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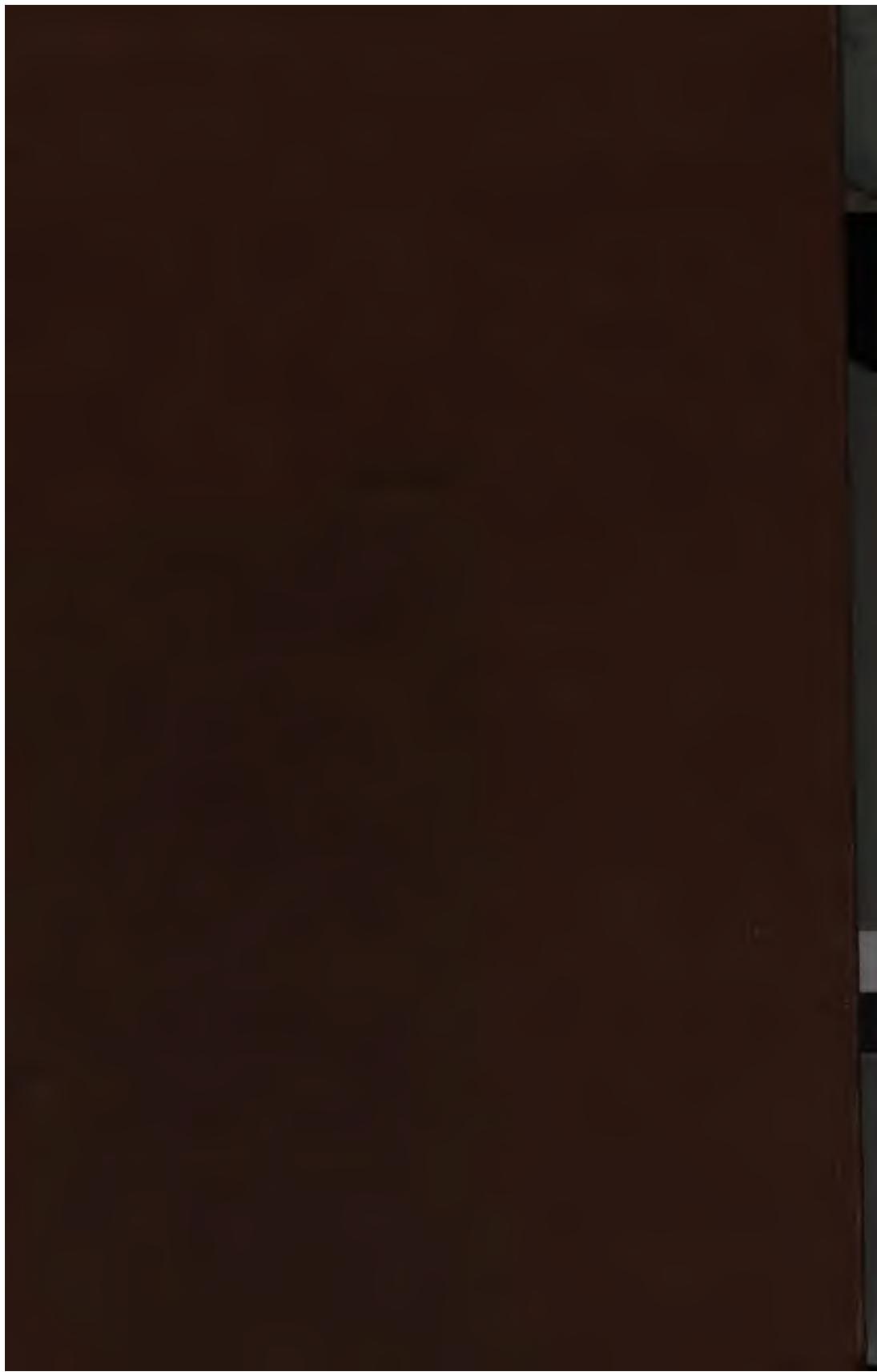
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ISAAC COMNENUS.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY THOMAS DAVISON, WHITEFRIARS.

RICH, CLAUDIOUS JAMES, an English traveller and scholar, born near Dijon, Burgundy, March 28, 1787, died in Shiraz, Persia, Oct. 5, 1821. When 15 years old he was familiar with Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Persian, and Turkish. In 1803 he obtained a cadetship in the East India company's service, and in 1804 was made a writer at Bombay. He was appointed secretary to Mr. Lock, consul-general to Egypt, but went first to Constantinople and Smyrna to perfect his knowledge of Turkish. He then visited Egypt, and having perfectly acquired the Arabic language, he travelled over a great part of Palestine and Syria as a Mameluke, visited the grand mosque at Damascus with a company of pilgrims, and finally reached Bassorah, whence he sailed to Bombay. Arriving there in Sept. 1807, he took up his residence in the house of Sir James Mackintosh, whose daughter he married the following year. In 1808 he was appointed by the East India company resident at Bagdad, where he remained about 6 years. He made collections of oriental manuscripts, medals, and coins, and of the gems and engraved stones found among the ruins of Babylon, Nineveh, and Ctesiphon. In 1811 he visited the site of Babylon, and published a work on its remains under the title of a "Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon." Major Rennell, in the "Archæologia," having doubted some of his conclusions, Mr. Rich undertook a second journey to that place, and in 1818 published a "Second Memoir on Babylon." In 1813 he left Bagdad on account of his health, went to Constantinople, and afterward to Paris, and in 1815 returned to Bagdad. In 1820 he travelled in Koordistan, going as far east as Sinna. After his death, which happened on a tour to Shiraz, the journal he kept during this journey was published by his widow under the title of "Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan" (1836). His collections were purchased by parliament for the British museum.

RICHARD I. (COEUR DE LION), second king of England of the line of Plantagenet, born in Oxford in Sept. 1157, died April 6, 1199. He was the 3d son of Henry II. and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and great-grandson in the female line of Henry I., youngest son of the conqueror. He received the chivalrous education that was common at that period, and became renowned for his proficiency in arms, and for his fondness for music and poetry. His fierce and turbulent character early manifested itself, as did also his ability as a soldier. He engaged with his brothers Henry and Geoffrey in a revolt against Henry II. before he had completed his 16th year, and fled to France, where he was knighted by Louis VII. Claiming Aquitaine and Poitou, he was compelled to give way before his father, to whom he surrendered, and by whom he was forgiven. He was then known as the count of Poitou, but claimed to be duke of Aquitaine. He was employed against the rebels in Aquitaine, whom he subdued, show-

ing much skill and energy in the war, and duchy was ceded to him by his father, v conduct with respect to it, however, showed he did not consider the act of cession as binding force. The last rebellion in Aquitaine was aided by Richard's elder brother, II whose death brought it to an end, and Richard became heir apparent, his eldest brother, Ham, having died young. The king desired that Richard should give up Aquitaine to his brother John, which he refused to do by their father's orders. John and Geoffrey ravaged their brother's territories, which had punished by invading Brittany, of which Geoffrey was ruler. The king then intended to restore peace. Richard subsequently rendered Aquitaine to his mother, but i shortly after restored to him, and by his father's orders he entered upon a war with the count of Toulouse, which was successfully waged. In the war between Henry II. and Philip Augustus in 1187, Richard showed want of fidelity to his father, but best could be decided the interference of the king put a stop to hostilities. Richard became intimate with Philip, which was offensive to Henry, and the prince was led to seize his father's treasure at Chinon, which he employed in fortifying castles in Poitou, at the instigation of the French king. Soon, however, a reconciliation was effected between the English monarch and his son, and the latter took cross in the third crusade; but in spite of the vow he had to renew the war with the count of Toulouse, and with success. He also took part in the next contest between Henry and Philip; but a report prevailing that his son intended to exclude him from the succession and confer the crown upon Prince John, and did homage to Philip for his English territories in France, under certain reservations. In the war that followed, Philip and Richard were victorious, and dictated terms to Henry, who soon after died of mortification, cursing his sons. Richard became king, July 6, 1189, and was greatly affected by his father's death. It is some excuse for his frequent rebellions that his mother was ill treated by his father, that Henry had seduced the princess, sister of Philip Augustus, who had been promised to Richard in marriage. Henry was jealous and arbitrary temper, and by his conduct created the rebellions from which Richard suffered so much. Domestic dissensions, too, the inheritance of the Angevine and Norman families that met in the person of Henry II. was said of him: "He comes from the devil and to the devil he will return." "The j. Eleanor," says Michelet, "with the passionate vindictiveness of her southern blood, enraged her sons' disobedience, and trained them to parricide. These youths, in whose veins mingled the blood of so many different Normans, Aquitanian, and Saxon, seemed to be certain, over and above the violence of Fulks of Anjou and the Williams of Eu."

pitably treated by the ruler of
Comnenus, who endeavored
of the persons of Berengaria
sister Joan, dowager queen of
d'comquered the island in a fort-
ide Isaac a perpetual prisoner.

who had perished in the expedition,
of the duke's conduct in seizing and
ing the English king, intending to
money he should be made to pay for
som. The king of France was desirous
Richard should not be released, and

ISAAC COMNENUS.

A PLAY.

5
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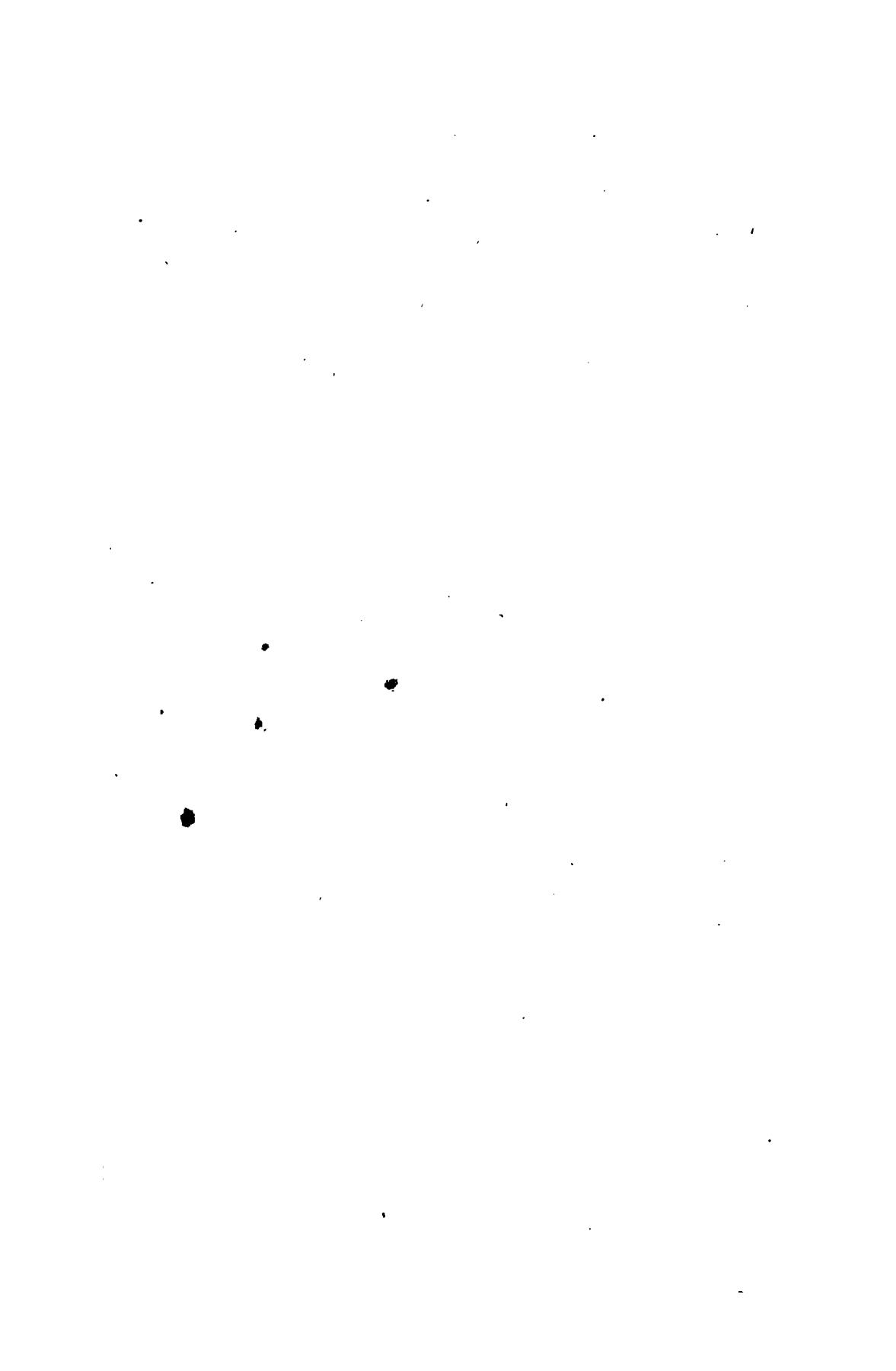
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Saylor, See A

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ISAAC COMNENUS,

A PLAY.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

NICEPHORUS BOTONIATES, Emperor of the East.

THE PATRIARCH OF THE GREEK CHURCH.

THE ABBOT of St. CONON'S.

MACRINUS, a military Leader under Isaac Comnenus.

NUMERIAN, another.

GERMANUS, a Courtier.

MANUEL, Barber to the Imperial Household.

EUDOCIA COMNENA, Sister of the Comneni.

ANNA COMNENA, Cousin of the Comneni.

Theodora, Daughter of the Emperor.

*Monks, Acolythes, Citizens, Soldiers, Eunuchs, Eparchs,
Exorcist, &c. &c. &c.*

SCENE—Constantinople and its Environs.

TIME—The year of our Lord 1088.



ISAAC COMNENUS.

ACT I.

S C E N E I.

ISAAC COMnenus AND MACRINUS.

COMnenus.

IT will not keep, Macrinus ; in such things
There is a rotten ripeness supervenes
On the first moment of maturity.

MACRINUS.

I well believe, my lord, that more such schemes
Have failed from over-wariness than rashness.

COMnenus.

Then be our last convention held to-night ;
And see that all be summon'd.

MACRINUS.

I'll look to it.

COMNENUS.

And I must to the palace.

MACRINUS.

The worse errand.

COMNENUS.

It is unseasonable, but not dangerous.

I know Nicephorus well.

He'd rather that an accident befell me

In any place than there.

MACRINUS.

I hope, my lord,

You put not too much trust in Theodora.

COMNENUS.

In her? No—little enough. I could secure her,

But having not a stomach to the means,

I fain would fancy that I do not want her.

Here comes a lordling of her train. Good day.

Enter GERMANUS.

GERMANUS.

My noble lord, the Cæsarissa waits
With marvellous impatience to behold you :
She bids me say so. Ah ! most noble Count !
A fortunate man—the sunshine is upon you—

COMNENUS.

Ay, sir, and wonderfully warm it makes me.
Tell her I'm coming, sir, with marvellous speed.

[*Exit GERMANUS.*

Didst thou take heed of yon homunculus ?

MACRINUS.

Ay, my lord, I mark'd him.

COMNENUS.

We work i' the dark and know not what we do.

He that begot him mean'd him for a man,
And yet thou see'st the issue. After dusk,
As soon as may be after dusk, Macrinus,
We meet again.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

*The Palace of the Emperors.**NICEPHORUS AND THEODORA.*

NICEPHORUS.

The Count not yet arrived ! still more and more
He shows a purposed tardiness of spirit.

THEODORA.

He never used to count the time by minutes.

NICEPHORUS.

The tidings that Alexius is recall'd
Cannot have reach'd him yet ?

THEODORA.

Surely they cannot.

NICEPHORUS.

Unless by treachery.

THEODORA.

Whom suspect you now ?

NICEPHORUS.

Nay, no one—none—but yet it may be so,

And he might thence surmise some ill intent
Was harbour'd here against him.

THEODORA.

If he should,

It were more like he came before the time
Than linger'd. But you bear an evil mind
Towards him, and 'tis therefore that you see
In all he does a sign that he mistrusts you.

NICEPHORUS.

There is much cause on both sides for distrust ;
'Tis thou alone who see'st not where it lies.

THEODORA.

I see that for the senseless fear of phantoms,
You left the safe and sought the dangerous road,
And you have found it.

NICEPHORUS.

Dangers there may be ;
But such as I shall know the end of soon.
'Tis time this tampering with our enemy
Should cease. It has endured a long half year
To pleasure thee, and thou art not content.

THEODORA.

'st thou to pleasure me? Ay, 'twas my pleasure,
Doubtless, that thy grey head and diadem
Should ~~be~~ be peril'd in a needless strife.

NICEPHORUS.

The strife will come at last—nor less the peril.
Thou hast made all advances which beseem thee,
And he is yet by word or deed unpledged.

THEODORA.

Court Isaac's lightest words mean something more
Than in court-currency they pass for. Thou
Nor any man beside can say how far
His heart is pledged.

NICEPHORUS.

Why thus much may be said;
Were it his choice to join his house to mine,
And take a safe succession for thy dower,
Knowing the contract might be made at once,
He would leave nothing doubtful.—All the light words
Of courtesy on which thou build'st thy hopes
Do but dissimulate the other choice

Which he has made—to wit, to try his strength
With ours in war.

THEODORA.

'Tis ye drive on the ~~bold~~ ;
He never would have sought it, so your fears
Had let him live in peace ; but evermore
Ye fear'd and fear'd till dangerous ye made him.

NICEPHORUS.

Have I not shown him every favour due—
Order'd the triumph for his ~~victories~~,
Myself partaking the festivities ?

THEODORA.

'Twould scarcely be acknowledged as it ought,
Since that ill accident the taster's death,
Who tasted of the cup you proffer'd him.

NICEPHORUS.

Ill accidents are ever in thy mouth.

THEODORA.

And since ~~his~~ triumph in the frontier war,
What has been wanting—what but open enmity,
To bid him be prepared for self-defence ?

Have ye not loosed the hydra of the state—
Have ye not stirr'd the vermin of the church—
Made compact with the natural enemies
Of order and of empire to molest him ?
And ye would have him move no step to meet you ?

NICEPHORUS.

Too many steps—too many and too long,
Too many strides Count Isaac hath advanced
That ever he should stay his foot in peace
Short of the throne. An enemy he is,
And as such must be dealt with. Cease not thou,
Meantime, to show him favour. But beware
Thou lead'st to no surmise that aught impends . . .
That aught I say beware
That thou endanger not thy filial faith.
It is not fitting that I meet him now :
Wherefore, thus warn'd, I leave thee.

[Exit.]

THEODORA.

Warn'd, and fear'd.

Had I been farther trusted with his counsels,
A better claim to thy good faith were his.

Where trust is not, there treachery cannot be.
Were but the Count as quick to apprehend
My leaning to his side, as long has been
My father to suspect my falling off,
We had ere this been better understood
Each of the other.

Enter COMNENUS.

THEODORUS.

Enough, Count Isaac, rise; you have forgotten
The well-deserved exemption you enjoy
From all except the first prostration.

COMNENUS.

True,

Great is my privilege in Byzantium!
Sometimes I stand upon two legs at court,
Where others, as befits them, go on four.

THEODORUS.

But tell me, Comnenus, could have met ere this—
Where hast thou been then?

COMNENUS.

Sleeping out the noontide.

THEODORA.

Asleep?

COMNENUS.

Why, wherefore not?

THEODORA.

Oh! it is no time for your race to sleep.

There have been tumults in the streets to-day

Might wake the dead.

COMNENUS.

'Tis true there was some shouting in the Forum;

It is a trick of the citizens: when it rains,

And corn is mildew'd, straight we have a swarm

Of curious knaves will find the reason why,

And having found, they noise it in the streets,

Which makes this outcry: plague upon all east winds!

THEODORA.

Whatsoever makes it,

It might have kept thee ~~wakeful~~, for thy name

Was as the burthen.

COMNENUS.

A most ponderous one.

I am the cause to-day; to-morrow's eve
It may be you, or, if it so chance, your father.

THEODORA.

I could reveal to you a hidden source
Of these dissensions: but I know not yet
At what you prize my confidence.

COMNENUS.

There are two values in a trust reposed:
The first, the knowledge from the trust derived;
The second, the good-will of those who give it.
For so much as 'tis given in free good-will
I value it.

THEODORA.

Supposing it so given,
What then to recompense this free good-will
Would you adventure?

COMNENUS.

Oh the infinite pain
Of hearing an interminable secret—

But not upon the instant unprepared,
For I must fast a month, and pray to God.
Meantime I take my leave, unless perchance
There's aught your highness would command me in ?

THEODORA.

You came at leisure—why this haste to go ?
Is the escaping from my confidence
A matter so immediate?—Thankless man !

COMENUS.

There you misjudge me : for the warning given
You have my thanks ; for what remains behind,
I can surmise its import to this length,
That 'tis intelligence more dangerous
For you to give than me thus warn'd to want.
I am content : that I am also thankful
Time *may* prove, or may *not* : 'tis true the same.
So fare you well.

THEODORA.

Is it for my sake that you ask no further ?
Would I could make you know me ; then would you
know

I am not lightly to be turn'd aside
By dangers from a cause my heart espoused.
You shall partake my counsels, and I yours,
And we will share the issue.

COMNENUS.

That can we never.

Nature has set apart our destinies,
And each must follow 'out the 'course assign'd ;
I mindful of this token of good-will,
Nor you regardless of your household ties.

THEODORA.

What is this talk of nature ? Hear my creed.
The strongest ties have Nature's strongest sanction,
And if the ties of blood be *not* the strongest,
Nature doth abrogate and make them void.

COMNENUS.

Where these are not the strongest all are frail.

THEODORA.

Most moral Sophist !
Say there *were* sin, the burden of my sins

Is on my conscience ; none of it on yours.

Then whom concerns it ?

COMNENUS.

Happy is the man,

Who, unpartaking of the evil thing,

Reaps the full harvest of another's sins.

But then what saith the Casuist ?—

THEODORA.

What he saith

This is no time to tell. What can it profit you

Thus to make answer in didactic vein

To overtures like mine. "Tis fit you know

They touch on life and death. This (learn from me)

Is not the time to speculate and ponder,

But with a resolute mind to choose your part.

COMNENUS.

Thanks for the words of wisdom ! passing sage

And profitable counsel had this been,

Were it not that—one melancholy night,

So long ago that I but then reposed

From my triumphal honors—on this night—
Lying awake through indigestion ~~caused~~
At the Imperial board—my part was chosen.

THEODORA.

Then act thy ~~part~~—a rash and obstinate part,
And like to prove a tragical—act thy part;
Thy life is in my hands; a few words less
And it had there been safe—but do thy will—
Rush headlong to thy ruin—I should have known
That never was there a Comnenus yet
Who would take part with any but his kin,
Or counsel save of his own proud heart.

COMNENUS.

If it be true mine ancestry and kin
Have all so stubbornly maintain'd this course,
It were presumption in my humble self
To wander from their ways. But rest assured
If Nature made us not for facile friends
We are not easily made enemies,
Nor eager in ill-will. So God be with you.

[Exit.

THEODORA.

Thus does he ~~coldly~~ crush the cherish'd hopes
For which I sacrificed all else. Henceforth
He'll have an enemy more dangerous
Than all that now surround him. Who ~~are~~ you?

Enter a Domestic.

DOMESTIC.

His sacred Majesty commanded me
To ask if yet your Highness was at leisure,
And could attend him?

THEODORA.

Tell him that I come.

[*Exit Domestic.*

These menial slaves are sent to pry about
And watch my motions. Ay; the time is past
For putting trust in me.

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.

Streets of Constantinople.

*A crowd of Monks, Acolythes, and Citizens of the blue
faction.*

FIRST CITIZEN.

Patience, fellow-citizens, I say patience. Let us all be patient. Let us all be patient.

FIRST MONK.

I say he is an Iconoclast.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Iconoclast ! I know not what is Iconoclast ! but this I know, there's no man ever wore a green scarf but deserved hanging in it.

FIRST MONK.

I tell thee he is an Iconoclast if ever one of his house was. Didn't he break the head of the holy St. Basil (whose name be glorified !) with the butt end of his lance ?

SECOND MONK.

I say Anathēma, I say Anathēma, I say Anathēma,
body and soul, life and limb, here and hereafter

MONKS AND ACOLYTHES.

Anathēma esto, Anathēma.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Patience, excellent friends and fellow-citizens ! I say
let us debate this matter as wise men with patience and
silence.

SECOND MONK.

I say body and soul, life and limb, hear and hereafter
be he cursed.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Then to hell with him at once.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Most assuredly, holy father, he shall go to hell.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Patience, sweet friends ; silence, gentle countrymen ;
patience and silence, I say. I am about to explain this
matter to you.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Why all this clamour? Silence, and hear the worthy Hypatius.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Silence! Why roar and growl ye thus like the bears in the Hippodrome?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Hem!—We are all agreed in one thing, that Count Comnenus is to be made an end of.

SECOND CITIZEN.

All, all.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Agreed, agreed.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Then having come to the conclusion, which is with us as it were the ground and beginning of the argument, it behoves us to look to the reasons, which are, as I may say, the ways and means of coming to the conclusion. For if you fall to without knowing the reasons, you'll be held for no better than brute beasts; since all your wise men, look ye, when they are resolved upon a thing, have

ever sought out the reasons before they began. Now you all know that last year's harvest in Cappadocia was scarce worth the ingathering, and that corn here in Constantinople cannot be had for money. And who is the cause of this, think ye?

ALL.

Comnenus, Comnenus.

FIRST CITIZEN.

And that the Huns and Bulgarians, and other such long-haired savages, carried fire and sword, and bows and arrows, and long spear and short spear through the heart, and as I may say to the very neck and heels of the Chersonese, and looked a very terrible look at us over the long wall.—And who brought all this about, think ye?

ALL.

Comnenus, Comnenus.

FIRST CITIZEN.

But how did Comnenus bring it about, answer me that?—You're dumb,—ye know not. Now hear me. You all know that some years by-gone this Comnenus

was out in the Persian war, fighting in as Christian-like a manner as I myself or any of you. Now mark ;—after he was taken prisoner, there comes to him in his tent one evening an old man, wrapped in a flowing vest, and holding, look ye, a cup in one hand and a mighty volume in the other. He was as wicked a magian as you shall see in all Persia ; and he said to him, look ye, he said, by these bones and relics I have forgot what he said. But ever since, this Comnenus has been one of your bloody schismatics and heretical murdering villains.

ALL.

We know it. We know it.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Ay, and you know too the holy image of the blessed St. Basil, in the niche over the monks of St. Conon's gate. Now this Comnenus, no farther back than one night I know not when, riding past like a madman with two or three more such heathen pagan knights from over-sea, puts me his lance in the rest with the butt end to the onset, and drives it two inches and a half into St. Basil's eye.

SECOND MONK.

Anathema esto !

ALL.

Anathema !

FIRST CITIZEN.

Softly ! you all know that St. Basil is the Patron Saint of this city ; now the case stands here ;—will he ever have an eye to this city again ?

ALL.

Never, never.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Never while Comnenus is in it.

CITIZENS.

We 'll drag him out of it, we 'll burn him alive.

FIRST CITIZEN.

But they 'll tell you, they of the green faction, that he 's a very Socrates, a second Cæsar, and holds your clubs are no better than oaten straws, and will not frighten the flies from lighting on your noses. But mark you this—Did Cæsar ever consort with wicked magians ? Did Cæsar ever hit St. Basil in the eye ?

CITIZENS.

No, no.

FIRST CITIZEN.

And though I think he be neither a saint nor a martyr,
yet I 'll be bound for him he was no blood-thirsty heretic.
Why then if Cæsar was no heretic, then a heretic can be
no Cæsar. And look ye, what I say is this,—shall all
Constantinople be starved to death because of one
man?

ALL.

Never, never. Burn his house. Cut his throat.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Then look ye, what I say is this,—if he be not already
fled forth the city gates—

CITIZENS.

Stop him, seize him, secure the gates.

SECOND MONK.

Smite him hip and thigh, hew him in pieces before the
Lord.

Enter an Eunuch of the Palace.

EUNUCH.

Why do ye flourish your staves i' the air, good friends ?
Worthy father, why dost thou ventilate thy garment i'
the east wind ? Whom seek ye ? *

ALL.

Comnenus, Comnenus.

EUNUCH.

Then your search is not like to be long, for I came be-
fore him but half the street's length.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Count Comnenus, said'st thou ? How attended ?

EUNUCH.

There is a young officer from the eastern army with
him.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Arm'd, arm'd, said'st thou ?

EUNUCH.

Ay, short sword, and shirt of mail.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Fall on him, down with them both. I'll run and make
sure of the east gate, lest he make his escape.

SECOND CITIZEN.

And I the north.

THIRD CITIZEN.

And I the south.

[*Exeunt all but FOURTH and FIFTH CITIZENS.*

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Lo you! how they run! to my thinking, they are no
better than arrant cowards.

FIFTH CITIZEN.

Assuredly they have the gift of running. But if we
stay here alone, we're dead men.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Certainly, dead men.

FIFTH CITIZEN.

Come along; they say this Comnenus is sworn
friend and minister to the devil. ~~I tell thee~~ Satan took
his bible-oath to back him out in aught he put his
hand to.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

I would go, but that it looks so villainous dastardly.

FIFTH CITIZEN.

Do as thou wilt. Fare thee well!

[Exit.]

Enter COMMENUS and an Officer of the Eastern Army.

COMMENUS.

One whom my brother

. . . . What dost stand i' the way for, friend?

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Nothing, worthy sir—good day, noble Count.

[Exit.]

COMMENUS.

One whom my brother holds in trust, to me

Is as a brother welcome. I had writ

The Count Alexius to reurge his coming,

But he outstrips my expectation. Speed,

'Tis true, is needful. You, yourself, may see

The state in which I stand. No day goes by

But fills the streets with tumult. Even now,

Methought I saw a flying rack o' the storm
Scud by to leeward. Say, what think you, sir ?

OFFICER.

My lord, for those that I have seen, they seem
The very scum o' the city and dregs o' the church.

COMNENUS.

Why so they are—yet these things come by cause.
You are a soldier, sir, ay, and a young one.
You would instruct me (for I ever found
Young soldiers apt to aid me with advice),
You would inform me that these are but shadows,
And some score lances would set all to rest.
Sir, if these slight imposthumes which you see
Were the disease, not, as they are, the symptoms,
Think you I'd send so far to have them lanced ?
This multitude, this monster idiot-born,
Moves you not one of its Briarean hands
By its own brainless head ; but let some chief,
Though he be ne'er so base, but whoop them on,
And they shall follow till the noblest fall.
Your master must be nearer ere I quit.
You left him at Ancyra ?

OFFICER.

There, my lord,
He waits your further tidings, or will move
With his small force more gently on to meet you.

COMMENUS.

'Twere good he came no further or came fast.
I wrote with some caution, sir, I'll speak with less ;
Well knowing whom my brother trusts trustworthy.
Tell him that in my mind the time of choice
Hath slidden from our grasp ; tell him that now
Our only armour is the crown and purple.
Here stands the throne, and there the block—I say
To one of these must the Comneni come :
So doth suspicion drive on that it fears,
And emperors leave no refuge save in empire.
This thou shalt tell my brother is my mind.
Say further thus.
If having duly weigh'd the double venture,
He hold forbearance for the lighter risk,
Let him lead back his forces, (for myself
I'd put the issue on a throw o' the dice
As lief as on aught else) : but so he view

These matters as I view them, let him on
With all the speed his lightest horse can make
To the Propontis on the hither shore,
And, barring accidents, I'll meet him there;
And you, sir, ~~too~~, I hope.

OFFICER.

Thanks, thanks, my lord : I'll use my utmost speed.

COMMENUS.

Do so when clear o' the suburbs : until then
Go leisurely in ken o' the popular eye.
I've noted when I send young gallants forth
In things of trust and moment, straight they'll lash
Their snorting horses to a furious gallop
To make a noise i' the streets. Take heed of this.
Use all despatch, not as to boast great things
Are staked upon thy speed, but so to join
Despatch with privacy as the stake's on both.
Deem that this trust is for the empire's weal,
And not to do thee credit. Fare thee well.

[*Exit OFFICER.*

He's a young envoy in a cause like this.
Alexius has the gift to make men zealous
Who serve him, and ne'er thinks what more is needful.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE IV.

An Apartment in a Convent near St. Conon's Shrine.

EUDOCIA and ANNA COMNENA.

EUDOCIA.

I never knew but all of us were fearless.
In tears ! I'll not believe you a Comnena.

ANNA.

Oh ! were I not I should not now be weeping ;
Heaven knows it is not for myself.

EUDOCIA.

Why there !
That were the least unreasonable cause.

Is it my brother that you weep for? He
Is nothing new to dangers nor to life.
His thirty years on him have nigh told double,
Being double loaden with the unlightsome stuff
That life is made of. I have often thought
How nature cheats this world in keeping count:
There's some men pass for old men who ne'er lived;
These monks, for instance; they count time, not spend it;
They reckon moments by the tick of beads,
And ring the hours with psalmody: mere clocks;
If one of these had gone a century,
I'd never say he'd lived. My brother's age
Has spann'd the matter of too many lives;
He's full of years, though young: ne'er weep for him.

ANNA.

He looks not tired of life.

EUDOCIA.

Not when with thee.

There is a sort of youth comes back on men
By sight of childhood. It is so with him;
At least by sight of thee.

ANNA.

But others, too,

Call him a cheerful man.

EUDOCIA.

They know him not.

You knew him not in earlier youth ; and I

Can scarce believe that it was he I knew.

The false vivacity of fever'd blood,

Under the press and spur of times like these,

Deceives not me ; nor yet the power he hath

Of holding off the burthen of his mind

Till the time come that leaves him to himself.

Disquieting thought hath wasted him within.

Weep for Alexius, if weep you must ;

His seems a life worth saving ; he is now

Much what some ten years past his brother was,

Yet may be what he is. Let Fate alone ;

There 's many a man is best cut off betimes.

Date not their destinies.

ANNA.

You love them not,

'Thought you 're their sister, as their cousin loves them.

EUDOCIA.

I wo~~n~~ not have them walk in the dusk like thieves,
Nor crouch like chidden slaves, nor dig them holes
And hide like Troglodytes. I'd have them live
Even as their ~~sires~~ of old, link'd each with each,
Careless of kingdoms so they might live free;
If not, I'd have them kings.

ANNA.

Alas! and I
Would count it no mischance that sent us back
To our Propontic Island, where we all
Were born and bred in peace, who now are strewn
Like a wreck'd convoy on a savage coast.

EUDOCIA.

Hush! Prophetess of woe. The ships sail well,
Though they be deep i' the water.

Enter COMNENUS.

EUDOCIA.

Here are we,
Obedient to your summons; both in doubt,

And one in dread, of what may be the cause.

Why have you sent us hither?

COMNENUS.

You well know,

Eudocia, that it never was my wont

To qualify ill-tidings for your ear.

The city is no longer safe for you:

Therefore I sent you hither.

ANNA.

And yourself?

COMNENUS.

My safety will be cared for in due course.

ANNA.

And stay you with us, then?

EUDOCIA.

No! by my faith;

That question *I* can answer. We seek here,

If I misjudge not, the good neighbourhood

Of Mother Church's Sanctuary.

ANNA.

And he?

EUDOCIA.

Thirsty you the Sanctuary's a place for him ?

COMNENUS.

I have a safer refuge. Mother Church
Hath no such holy precinct that my blood
Would not redeem all sin and sacrilege
Of slaughter therewithin. But there's a spot
Within the circle my good sword describes,
Which by God's grace is sanctified for me.

EUDOCIA.

Yet do not be so rash to walk the streets
Without a guard.

ANNA.

Are not the riots quell'd ?

COMNENUS.

They are not : they increase and will increase
Until the *cause* be quell'd.

ANNA.

What is the cause ?

COMNENUS.

There are, if truth were known, some three or four ;
But one is named.

EUDOCIA.

And what may be its name?

COMNENUS.

They call it by my name, Comnenus.

EUDOCIA.

Then they miscall it.

COMNENUS.

No, not altogether.

When things of evil aspect are to do,

The first cause is not named ; but commonly

Some slight, remote, coöperative cause,

Whereto the people knit them soul and body,

Unknowing that which stirs them up to act,

Which is the mover's cause and not the multitude's.

The mover finds them reasons, they him hands.

EUDOCIA.

Whence hath he then these reasons ?

COMNENUS.

Oh ! they grow wild.

He is an arrant bungler in his work,

Whate'er it be, who is not stored with reasons.

Reasons ! there's nought in life so plentiful !

They are the most besetting snares of men
Who ought to act by instinct, did they but know
How far their nature, when not tamper'd with,
Their prostituted reason would transcend.

EUDOCIA.

But how are you the cause?

COMNENUS.

The multitude

Were ready to accept of any cause.
There's much sedition in your gastric juice
Gnawing the empty coats of poor men's stomachs.

EUDOCIA.

This tells me nothing: prithee to the point.

COMNENUS.

What would you have?

EUDOCIA.

I'd have thee signify
What is our hope, what ought to be our aim,
What's to be fear'd, what to be done. . . .

COMNENUS.

Ay—true:

I never knew a woman placed in peril
But must be *doing* something—dead despair,
Or fever'd action :—Muse, Eudocia,
Muse, meditate, and moralize like me.
That which I crave of thee is quietness.
Thou would'st intrust me with thy safety, Anna ?

ANNA.

Truly I would not trust thee with thine own,
So I could find thee a more careful guard.
But as for mine I'd trust it with a foe.

COMNENUS.

Where would you find one ?

ANNA.

Oh ! it were easy ;
Foes are as plentiful as lukewarm friends.

EUDOCIA.

There was a sting in that reply, methinks.

COMNENUS.

My cousin, may you ne'er have cause to prove
The fervour of your friends.—Hark ! there 's the bell :
Is it for vespers ?

ANNA.

It is even-song time.

COMNENUS.

And you attend it?—tell the Abbess, then,
That I detain my sister—has she leave?

EUDOCIA.

Ay, say so, cousin.

[*Exit ANNA.*

COMNENUS.

My time is short; but something must be told,
Which 'twere as well she heard not. Why it is,
I know not, (for the thing must come to her
As to all else in time), but I would not
Disclose to her—no, not a thousandth part—
The knowledge of the world which I have earn'd.

EUDOCIA.

And what has happen'd now?

COMNENUS.

A summons came
From Theodora: I attended her,
And found her ready to betray her father.

EUDOCIA.

She is more passionate than politic,
Yet lacks not cunning : she has then despair'd
Of winning you by fairer means ?

COMNENUS.

And these

Have fail'd her likewise : I refused her suit.

EUDOCIA.

But not her tidings ?

COMNENUS.

I refused them too.

It went against my nature to accept them.
I am prepared for whatsoe'er befalls,
Or shall be on the morn. Provision 's made
Where it may be adventured here within.
To-morrow night, so that his purpose hold,
Alexius may be look'd for. You, from hence,
Can reach the shrine upon an instant's warning ;
There wait in safety the result : if ill
To thee, Eudocia, I need not say
How ruin should be met.

EUDOCIA.

If it be well,

Then no instructor will my brother need
How he should wear the diadem.

COMNENUS.

Enough.

That's as it may fall out. My brows, in sooth,
Would rather bare them to the breath of heaven
Than be so gold-encircled: yet you say well,
I shall need no instructor. It grows late.
I think I have said all. Farewell, Eudocia.
It may be long ere we shall meet again,
Yet is it not for us to make long partings.

EUDOCIA.

Yet one word more:—

I heard strange stories of a feast last night,
To which you bade your friends: it is not true?

COMNENUS.

It makes for me that it should pass for true.
'Twas a Damoclean feast, and we sat down
In flowing robes with corslets underneath;

And I may say I ne'er saw graver guests
Met to carouse, save at the royal board,
Where memory evocates imperial deeds,
Such as betray'd Britannicus of old.

Another such has waited me too long.

Be strong of heart—be like thyself.—Farewell.

[Exit.]

EROCIA.

And I could say to thee “ Be strong of heart,”
But that were needless, and “ Be like thyself”
Were an injunction I would qualify.

[Exit.]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Palace of the Cæsars.

NICEPHORUS.

NICEPHORUS.

Priests are even all but kings, and would be kings,
But that the diadem disdains bald crowns.
That snake engendered amid Rome's green ruins,
The inheritor of Satan's pomp and pride,
At whose fierce hiss the royal Henry shook
An emperor excommunicate, and bow'd
His haughty spirit, after three days' fast,
To walk barefooted to Canusio's gates
Most abject in submission—that proud priest
Is imitated here: but I can spurn
Their interdicts, and call my crown my own,
Seeing their schism doth comminute their power.
Have I no servants?—what! no slaves?—not one?
Ho! Corius! Lazer!

Enter Attendant.

Comes not our reverend lord the patriarch yet?

ATTENDANT.

Not yet, my liege.

NICEPHORUS.

Ha! what hast got beneath thine upper vest?

Here, here; 'tis steel!

ATTENDANT.

The star you bade me wear.

NICEPHORUS.

Ay, true—the star—thou hast deserved it well.

The patriarch, as I think, is past his hour;

The moon should rise at eight, and we should see her,

But that the horizon's cloudy;—yon's her light.

Go look at the Persian water-clock, 't will tell

Within a trifle—What! thou hast been forth—

There's dust upon thy sandals! where hast been?

ATTENDANT.

You sent me for my lord the patriarch, sire.

NICEPHORUS.

Ay, true, 'twas thou ; I send because I trust thee.
What 's doing in the streets ?

ATTENDANT.

Sire, here and there
The people gather, and shout out the name
Of Count Comnenus, and reproach his house
For all the ills they suffer.

NICEPHORUS.

Why so let them.
What, saw'st thou nought of the other faction, ha ?

ATTENDANT.

My liege, there 's none can see them ; they 're so few
And cowardly they dare not venture forth.

NICEPHORUS.

Well : let me know the hour.

[*Exit Attendant.*

There never was a kingdom but comprised
Some thousands of bold men who hate the king,
And in some kingdoms there are none who love him.
And of these thousands one life sacrificed

In killing of this king would quench the hate,
The manifold hate, which burns these bosoms dry.
Now, it is strange, that men hang, burn, and drown
For love, religion, pride, I know not what,—
Cast away life for very wantonness,—
Yet of these thousands you shall not find one
Will dare an instant death, and slay the king.
And through the lack of this one instrument,
Innocuous malice lies a coiled-up snake
Through life till toothless age. Now, I am one,
Not hated like some kings—my only haters
Are the suppress'd, who would have ris'n too high ;
And they are—What 's the matter ?

Enter Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

Please my liege,
The patriarch has arrived.

NICEPHORUS.

At last. Admit him.
—And they are yet more hated than they hate,

Careless withal, incautious, eating, drinking,
Sporting, and sleeping, like a Goth or Frank
After a victory. Then wherefore fear them ?
The church is willing too to bear my burden,
For kings should never seem to be men's foes,
There being always some to take that part
Whose malice, seeming thwarted, spurs them on
To gather all the scandal of its ends.
Thus with this headstrong priest, in extreme age
Fiercer and firier—

Enter Patriarch.

Most reverend lord,
We give you hearty welcome.

PATRIARCH.

May the host
Of heaven in all good thoughts preserve the king !

NICEPHORUS.

I sent for thee through pressure of some ills
That weigh but heavily on ourself and state.
How is 't, my lord, that in our sovereign seat

We cannot rest in peace for slaves and monks
Careering through the streets from morn to night?

PATRIARCH.

How is it, say you, sire? Why thus it is,
Yea, thus it is. The sovereign arm is ~~weak~~,
The sovereign heart is palsied, and the church,
Reft of her strength thereby, is trampled down.
How is it? look abroad—Time, crippled sore,
Hath lost his footing, and slid back three ages.
I tell thee, the spirit of Isaurian Leo,
Accursed Heresiarch! is forth and fighting.

NICEPHORUS.

My lord, I know the church doth ever cry
That heresies are growing, yet she thrives
From age to age, till crowns but hang on crosiers.

PATRIARCH.

Yea, doth she thrive? and from her very walls
The images of her most glorious saints
Down shiver'd into shards, her earthly ministers
By every uncommunicating slave
Laugh'd unto scorn! yea, thriving call you this?

Then, by the bones of every martyr'd saint,
The ~~empire~~ and the church shall thrive alike.

NICEPHORUS.

Be temperate, priest.

Patriarch.

I tell thee, monarch, when the crosier bends,
The sceptre breaks ; and I will tell thee more,
'Twere better for thy temples to have worn
The iron crown in Lombardy, than here
Thy golden diadem and tarnish'd thus.

NICEPHORUS.

What would'st thou have ? I sent for thee to aid,
Not to upbraid me . Seek I not an end
To all these evils, or did *I* begin them ?
None can more heartily desire their cure.

Patriarch.

The church shall aid with her maternal arm,
Propping her aged servant at his task.
I am gone in years, my liege, am very old,
Coreless and sapless, weak, and needs must crave
Support of secular force, else had this sore

Not grown upon us thus. It is not well
When that the Church and State divide their pow' [redacted]
And carp upon the difference. In my youth
I can remember, old as I may be,
I sojourn'd at the Convent of St. Anne [redacted]
In the Hercynian Forest; and one night
There was a storm abroad, and I did walk
Abroad along with it, when in the wood
I saw an aged oak, which groan'd and creak'd
And flung its arms aloft, whereof the nearest
Ground each into the other till both fell,
Sawn thoro' sheer; and this liken'd I
To Nebuchadnezzar's tree of Monarchy—
But I am wandering; 'tis mine age's weakness.

NICEPHORUS.

The question is how surest to proceed:
It is the Church Comnenus has offended.

PATRIARCH.

I [redacted] abet your Majesty in all,
So it be sudden. Whatsoe'er is fear'd
In states is dangerous. The man is bold,

His friends are many ; and it were not safe
To ~~trust~~ him retribution is at hand.

NICEPHORUS.

That is my fear : for he is not like all.
There is a desperate carelessness of life
In him which oft secures it when most menaced.

PATRIARCH.

His friends are not as he is. Him removed,
They straight are nothing.

NICEPHORUS.

How canst thou divide them ?

PATRIARCH.

My liege, 'twere easy, as I said, if sudden.
But let a rumour of our aim go forth,
And him made desperate at the head of friends
Whom he knows well the art, when at their head,
To keep as firm as rocks, whom else each wind
Would shake adrift like waves—this suffered, sire,
I answer not for what might then betide.

NICEPHORUS.

What would'st thou counsel as the safest means ?

PATERIAECH.

Commit him to the power of Mother Church,
Call we a Synod, cite we the Count forthwith
To answer for his sacrilege.

NICEPHORUS.

What! now?

PATERIAECH.

Now, now, I say, the time is fitting; thus,
Surprise shall bar resistance or escape.
The measure of his wickedness fill'd full,
We take him in the surfeit of his sins.

NICEPHORUS.

'Tis sudden, but I think it may be safest.
I will adopt thy counsel.

PATERIAECH.

May God speed it!
Despatch a guard to seize him: I meanwhile
Will summon here the Synod.

NICEPHORUS.

And the award?

What dost thou purpose?

PATRIARCH.

That is for the Church

Assembled to adjudge : the sinner thou
Deliverest to her hands ; the rest is hers :
And she will purge her Sanctuary, be sure.

NICEPHORUS.

Yet bear in mind that nothing has been proved
Of treasonable kind ; and, lacking proof,
I burthen not my conscience with his blood,
Nor that of any of his faction.

PATRIARCH.

Sire,

Know you not there are maladies in men
Which in their rise were easy to be cured
Were they but known ; whereof when clear become
The diagnostics, difficult is the cure.
Rebellion must be dealt with in its growth ;
If after, bloodless remedies are weak.
This is an issue that concerns the Church,
Which duly will adjudicate the cause.

NICEPHORUS.

Order it so. My crown these last few years
Hath press'd some furrows in my brow which else
Time had been tardier with. It lightens me
To have a friend like thee, in whom I trust.

PATERIANUS.

God have your Majesty in his safe keeping !
An hour will bring us hither.

NICEPHORUS.

In an hour
The culprit shall attend you. God be with thee !

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE II.

The Palace of the Comneni. The board spread as for a feast. MACRINUS, NUMERIAN, and others. Leaders and soldiers of the faction dressed as revellers, musicians, attendants, &c. Arms appear occasionally underneath the dresses.

Enter COMNENUS.

COMNENUS.

What ! friends, the board is spread ; and ye abide
The coming of the host ? Much grieved is he
His noble guests should wait. But how is this ?
Methinks I see a circle of grave looks.

MACRINUS.

My lord, we have not all the art, like you,
To cast aside perplexities and cares :
But though our looks be grave, our hearts are stanch.

COMNENUS.

Well then we 'll all be grave. Be seated, friends :

But pledge me first in this ; 'tis Samian wine,
 And of the innermost ; it quickens counsel,
 And makes it bolder, which with us is better.
 Your toast, sir. You are practised much in toasts.

NUMERIAN.

I am, sir, and in things of more concern.
 "The double dyeing of the Royal purple."

COMNENUS.

No, no, sir, no : we're drinking wine, not blood.
 Success to us : say nothing of the rest.

[*They drink.*

My lord Macrinus—to the head of the board ;
 I shall be but a listener.

MACRINUS.

Sir, I thank you ;
 But there are worthier of that place than I.

COMNENUS.

None, none, Macrinus, that I know of, none,
 And if there be they'll pardon me the choice.
 Sit close about the board and speak not loud.

[*They sit.*

When we brake off last night, sirs, I remember
We had some difference as to modes and times.
You said, sir, as I think——

FIRST LEADER.

My lord, my thought
Would bumbly this; that could we seize some post
Within the walls, 'twould profit were our cause;
Since flight doth alway with a vulgar sort
Give token of defeat or loss, and thence
Their spirits swell with triumph.

SECOND LEADER.

But, my lord,
In my mind it were good they do thus swell.
For as despair doth oft avert men's ruin,
So causeless exultation brings it on;
The one emboldening reason, the other folly.

THIRD LEADER.

Besides, supposing we could win this post,
'T would make the times of action cross; for look,
Wait we your brother's coming, we're too late,
The news is theirs as soon as ours,—not wait,

And should he be delay'd, we're premature ;
For you'll observe, my lord,

COMENUS.

Enough, enough ;
I see your objection, sir, and hold it good.

FIRST LEADER.

Yet, sir, there are some reasons we o'erlook

COMENUS.

There are, sir, many ; which I overpass,
Not wholly overlook ; for should I stop
To weigh you each particular grain of reason
The mind has gather'd and glanced o'er, good sir,
'T would hold you here till morning. Not to add,
That so multiply the chance of error.
We'll hold this matter, with your leave, adjusted.

SECOND LEADER.

My lord, you would not pass Numerian's toast,
Yet would I deem it over-lenity,
To spare another's blood and stake our own.
One death or ere the strife began, my lord,
Might save some thousands.

COMNENUS.

But not salve the sin.

My friends, God knows too lenient am I not,
And it is less repugnant to my nature
To be the cause whereby a thousand bleed,
~~Them~~ kill designedly but one to save them.
Which there is reason for howe'er we gloze.
This once for all, him hold I a false friend,
(Which signifies I hold him worse than foe)
Who strikes at any life save in fair fight.

Enter ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

My lord, there's one waiting at the gate to see you.

COMNENUS.

One—what one, who?

ATTENDANT.

I know not, sir ; he has a cloak all round him,
Like a Varangian from over seas.

COMNENUS.

My friends, await me there within awhile.

MACRINUS.

You 're armed ?

COMNENUS.

From head to foot.

[*They withdraw.*

Enter THEODORA.

COMNENUS.

When I shall know my guest to be a friend,
I'll give him welcome.

THEODORA.

You may give it then.

[*Discovering herself.*

You might have known her for a friend long since,
She only gives you one proof more.

[*Giving her hand.*

COMNENUS.

A fair one.

THEODORA.

You scarcely seem surprised.

COMENUS.

Not much ; not much.

Ten years are gone since I have felt surprise,
Save at my own existence and the stars.

THEODORA.

You *might* have been surprised had I *not* come,
For had this ill-timed revelling endured
Another hour, thy fate had then been seal'd ;
But I watch'd for thee, and have come to save thee.

COMENUS.

I pray you speak no ill of this good supper.
Your countrymen, the Thracians, held of old
Their counsels o'er their cups in night carouse,
Perpending them next morn.
Such was my this night's senate.

THEODORA.

You and yours
Had seen no morn to follow on this night
But for the watch I kept, the word I bring.
Say but you wish my guidance to evade

The danger, I will then impart the whole,
And lead you into safety.

COMNENUS.

All I wish
Is for the Lady Theodora's honour.

THEODORA.

It is well said, my Lord, though coldly said.
You care not for her love, though to win yours
She has adventured ways that few would dare,
In quest of that they need not. O Comnenus!
You know not what a woman's heart can dare,
Nor how undauntedly her heart can love,
With what unbounded trust,—grant only this,
This one condition, to be loved again :
Nor know you yet what saviours they may prove,
How vigilant and quick to apprehend
When danger is approaching him they love,
And reckless of themselves and their well-being,
So they may ward it off—witness this night

COMNENUS.

A very gloomy witness, as I live !
Your Highness was too venturesome—the night air,
As you observe

THEODORA.

This madness then still holds.

But there is more you know not of in me :
You know not I am dangerous when slighted.
My turn will come ; the scorner shall be scorned ;
And I will spurn you when you supplicate
The intercession of but one kind word.
And now farewell. I leave you to your fate.

Enter ATTENDANTS.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

My Lord—

SECOND ATTENDANT.

My Lord—

COMNENUS.

Hold ! see you not her Highness ? One at once,
And softly .

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Sir, the Varangian Guard is at the gate,
With two Officials of the Church.

COMNENUS.

What say they?

FIRST ATTENDANT.

They claim admittance on a royal warrant,
Citing you to attend a Synod.

COMNENUS.

Good.

Admit them.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

What! the Churchmen, sir?

COMNENUS.

Ay, all.

Open the gates; let all who will come in.

Thou staring idiot, do my bidding straight.

[*Exit First Attendant.*

Here, Porgius, hark!—thy wit runs somewhat deeper,—

When all are in, look that the gates be shut.

[*Exit Second Attendant.*

Go tell the Lord Macrinus I would see him.

[*Exit Third Attendant.*

Your warning, lady, would have come but late,
Had it been given. I thank you for the purpose.

Enter MACRINUS.

COMNENUS (*meeting and speaking aside to him*).

Macrinus, our debate is at an end.

MACRINUS.

Indeed ! my lord ; this end was little look'd for.

COMNENUS.

It is as well they take it in their hands
To model our devices. As they will.
Make speed, Macrinus, to the southern gate,
With but such numbers as may make it sure,
Yet not alarm the town. Close by it stands
The cloisters of St. Conons; send some friend
To warn my sister and my cousin ~~the~~
To fly to sanctuary. Within an hour,

If all be well, I mean to pass the gate.
That will not press you?

MACRINUS.

Ample time, my lord.

COMMENUS.

Send Hertius round to draw our scatter'd friends
To the same spot,—be sure within the hour.
I will amuse the king and court till then.

MACRINUS.

But for these guards?

COMMENUS.

They may be easy dealt with.

When they're within the gates, disarm and bind them;
They shall along with me.
Hark! now they enter.

MACRINUS.

I ~~will~~ see them safe.

[Exit.]

COMMENUS.

Your father's action overtakes our talk.

THEODORA.

Oh, Heaven ! so sudden ! had I said it sooner—
Some slight observance, somewhat less of insult,
Might once—but still, oh say you will requite it,
And I may yet find means—

COMMENUS.

Nor now, nor ever,
Will I make bargains for a lady's love.

Enter Two Officials of the Church.

What is your errand, sirs ?—say on ; no form.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

Lord Count, our errand is to take thee hence,
By virtue of this power.

COMMENUS.

Nay, keep the scroll ;
Your tone 's so lofty, you must needs have powers.
But should I ask indulgence for an hour,
To be prepared ?

SECOND OFFICIAL.

My Lord, it cannot be.

The Conclave waits.

COMNENUS.

Ay, doth it? then I come.

I pray you first to take a cup of wine:

This juice might soften Churchmen.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

No, my Lord:

Our orders are to bear with no delay.

COMNENUS.

To bear with none!

[*A disturbance without.*

Oh! be at ease, sirs: hark!

'Tis but disputes between my guards and yours,

Which shall become my escort to the court.

Enter Attendants.

ATTENDANT.

My Lord, your orders are obey'd.

COMMENUS.

'Tis well.

Confine these Churchmen in the lower dungeon.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

My Lord, beware how you maltreat the Church.

COMMENUS.

We leave them there, and on our march be sure
No voice be heard, nor any leave their ranks.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

I say, each martyr, confessor, and saint,
Shall deal sore vengeance—

SECOND OFFICIAL.

Silence, 't will but goad him ;
'Tis plain he's master.

COMMENUS.

Order thus the march :

The royal guard within, unarm'd and bound,
My own surrounding them, myself will lead,—
This lady with me. Now, sirs, we must part.

[*To the Priests.*

Keep your own secret : it is safe with me.

[*To THEODORA.*

FIRST OFFICIAL.

Lord Count—

COMNENUS.

Nay, on, sirs : I will not molest you,
Save with restraint till morning.

SECOND OFFICIAL.

Sir, we thank you.

COMNENUS.

[*To THEODORA.*] Give me your hand.—Not so? then
walk by me,

And doubt not my protection. You came here
In no such friendly guidance. There—[as they go out]
—just so.

All as I wish'd, Macrinus : fling the gates open,
And sound the trumpets of the royal guard.
Out, out, friends, out.

[*Exeunt. Trumpets sound, and marching is heard.*

SCENE III.

A Hall in the Palace, where many Ecclesiastics are assembled in Synod. The Emperor is seated on a Throne at the further end of a Table, at which are also seated the Patriarch, the Bishop of Trebizond, the Bishop of Nicomedia, Synodial Secretary, and other Dignitaries: In front the Bishops of Heraclea and Philippopolis are conversing in an under tone, and are joined by the Bishop of Cæsarea.

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

Methinks the time is long.

BISHOP OF PHILIPPOPOLIS.

It passeth heavily away.

BISHOP OF CÆSAREA.

I heard the Bishop of Trebizond whispering the Patriarch of an idle rumour, that the heretics were found watching, and had overpowered the royal guard.

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

At such times there are ever such rumours.

BISHOP OF CÆSAREA.

Hark!—No. 'Tis nothing. Is not the emperor paler than his wont?

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

He is as white as an almond tree in June.

BISHOP OF CÆSAREA.

And my Lord, the Bishop of Trebizond?

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

There's no more blood in his face than in this crucifix.

PATRIARCH.

What is your talk, my Lords? Speak out, speak out: there be no Laics here. Speak freely out.

BISHOP OF CÆSAREA.

Do thou make answer.

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

Most holy Father, we spaké how that this heretic hath tarried long.

Patriarch.

He cometh late to judgment ; yea, too late.
Long-suffering are the delegates of Heaven ;
Abounding they in mercy and in goodness :
So judgment followeth sin with tardy steps.
To [redacted] late—too late.

Emperor (*to one of the Ecclesiastics*).

Send some one forth to look [redacted] they be coming.

[*Exit Ecclesiastic.*]

Patriarch.

I say we're all too late.
Hast written out the award ?

The Secretary.

Holiest Father, it is here.

Patriarch.

We'll have it sign'd at once.
First to his Majesty, and then the rest.

Emperor.

Not me, not me ; the thing concerns not me.

Patriarch.

Well, well, here's warranty enough without.

[Signs.] So—pass it to my Lord of Trebizonde.

THE BISHOP OF TREBIZOND.

Must I sign first?

Patriarch.

At once, my Lord, and pass it.

BISHOP OF HERACLEA (*aside to the Bishop of Cæsarea*).

Mark ye how the style trembles in his hand.

THE SECRETARY.

My Lord, you're writing ~~on~~ the written part:

The space is here.

BISHOP OF TREBIZOND.

My eyesight fails me: here,—I see, I see.

Enter an Attendant.

EMPEROR.

Thine errand?

We wave the adorations, speak thine errand.

OFFICER.

The Royal Guard is entering the gates.

EMPEROR.

'Tis well, right well.

Let them bring up the prisoner.

PATERIANUS.

Bring him up.

Most reverend Lords, we pray you take your seats.

Enter another Attendant in haste.

ATTENDANT.

'Tis not the Royal Guard ; 'tis the Comnenians : they
have passed the gates, Count Isaac at their head.

EMPEROR.

Great God ! then all is lost !

Where is the Cæzarissa ?

BISHOP OF TREBIZOND.

We shall be murdered all !

BISHOP OF CESAREA.

We're martyrs doomed.

BISHOP OF HERACLEA.

Yea ; verily the hour is come, and we are called and
chosen.

*During these exclamations the Hall has filled with
Officers of State and Attendants crowding in con-
fusedly.*

Patriarch.

Silence, my Lords, what craven cries be these?
Your Majesty will please send some one forth
To draw your forces from the suburbs round.
I tell you take your seats. Ho! God is great!
His Church is mighty, and that might have we.
I say, bring up the Count.

SEVERAL VOICES.

He's coming up.

Patriarch.

I say, then, let him come.

Enter Comnenus; he walks to the foot of the table, the crowd falling back on either side.

Comnenus.

I'm here to answer to your summons.

Patriarch.

Lo!

Almighty God is present in his Church!
His Church is present here!

How hast thou dared then to profane this presence
By coming here in arms? Give up thy sword.

Comnenus ungirds his sword, and flings it on the table.

Comnenus (after some pause).

What would ye have with it, that cannot use it?
My Lords, ye do but mock me: here am I,
Brought by your midnight summons from my house,
And ye have nought to say. Ye do but mock me.

PATRIARCH.

We mock thee not: 'tis thou that mock'st high Heaven.
Thou 'rt summon'd here on many an ugly count
Of sacrilege, and heresy, and schism,—
Which so thou answer not, and clear thy fame,
We shall, in due acquittance of our trust,
Pronounce the interdict from fire and water,
And cut thee off from Christian fellowship.

COMNENUS.

My Lords, or ere ye do inhibit me
From fire and water, have it you in charge
I cut not off yourselves from earth and air.
My Lords, this world is not so all your own

That ye can grant away the elements
Amongst your friends, and lock one moiety up
From them that like you not. Ye kneel and pray
That God will make you humble as the dust,
Then, rising, arrogate omnipotence,
And shake the ashes from your shaven crowns.
But I will teach you veriest lowliness.

PATRIARCH (*holds up the cross and pronounces the adjuration, “Ecce crucem Domini! fugite partes adversæ!”*)

A man possess'd—'tis Sathan speaks, not he!
The father of lies hath spoken by his mouth.
An exorcist for this Demonic straight,
To disenchant his body of the fiend !

COMNENUS.

Ye charge your own malignancy on me.
A Demonocracy of unclean spirits
Hath govern'd long these Synods of your Church :
The Antichrist foretold : and I am he
Who, in the fulness of th' approaching time,
Will exorcise you all. Expect my coming. [Exit.]

(*A short silence ensues, during which several persons, who had followed Comnenus, re-enter, exclaiming, “The Count is gone!”*)

PATRIARCH.

Thy wrath go with him, God !

EMPEROR.

I hear the sound of horses' feet afar ;
The city force is out—he cannot stay,
But will abscond, and seek support abroad.
Let every Tribune hie him to his charge.
The Prefects and the Eparchs will resort
To the Bucoleon with what speed they may,
And there I'll meet them. Each man to his charge.

PATRIARCH (*to the Bishops*).

Soldiers of God, spiritual militants !
Fight the good fight ! on us devolves the charge
To fulminate the censures of the Church ;
And on the morn, before Sophia's shrine,
Shall this high charge be solemnly fulfill'd.
Let every Churchman now assembled here
Attend and share the office.—I dismiss you. [Exeunt.

SCENE IV.

Precincts of the Palace.

*An Eunuch of the Imperial Household and an
Exorcist.*

EXORCIST.

He is gone, then ?

EUNUCH.

Gone ! he galloped out of the town as if he had ten thousand devils in him.

EXORCIST.

Well, I am glad he is gone before I came, for to say the truth he is ill to deal with.

EUNUCH.

But thou couldst exorcise him ?

EXORCIST.

Oh ! if you come to the matter of ~~saint~~, an evil spirit is no more in one man than in another.

EUNUCH.

But tell me, I beseech thee, which Saint is the most powerful for freeing the Demoniacs ?

EXORCIST.

That is, look ye, according as they are obsessed or possessed ; and also according to the order of the Spirit : now for the abrupton of evil Spirits of Belphegor's or the ninth order, St. George of Cappadocia is your only Saint. I have known him bring the Devil clean out of a man's body before ever he knew him to have been there.

EUNUCH.

Ay, indeed !

EXORCIST.

Yes ; and you may remember Anthemius the Eparch, who was possessed of Leviathan, and caused a dropsy in the Emperor's daughter. I never had a more obstinate Spirit to deal with in all my experience.

EUNUCH.

But you succeeded ?

EXORCIST.

I bless God, by the help of St. George, to say nothing of my own secret receipt for suffumigation, I brought him fairly out at last, and her Highness was cured.

EUNUCH.

But did she not relapse in the space of a year or so?

EXORCIST.

Relapse? Yes, she did relapse; for look ye, there's nothing sneaks back into a man's body so soon as your villainous evil Spirit.

EUNUCH.

But Anthemius has not troubled you lately?

EXORCIST.

No; the Emperor sent him to the prisons of Lethe on the other side of the water, and the word went he was strangled.

EUNUCH.

So he was, that's certain.

EXORCIST.

What was it for, then?

EUNUCH.

Some idle tongues spake how that all was not as it

should be between him and the Princess ; but what plainly appeared against him was, that he stole the hood of a Benedictine Friar from his cell after eleven o'clock at night, and being afterwards at the Sabbath of evil Spirits and magicians, did there put it upon Satan's head, saying " hoc honore dignus es," in contempt of St. Benedict and his holy Order.

EXORCIST.

God's mercy ! it was time he was put out of the way.
What will not a man do when once he is maleficated !

EUNUCH.

Ay ; and who could bring him about without your help ?—Come, we are friends, tell us some of the secrets of your craft.

EXORCIST.

There be things whereon we discourse to our friends,
and there be things whereon we hold our peace.

EUNUCH.

Nay but——

EXORCIST.

Mark me. There is an inside and an outside to every thing. There is a virtue in silence, and that virtue is

discretion, discretion being the virtue of those virtuous men that be silent and discreet. Again—he that saith nothing doth wisely, for what he knows is more than you know.

EUNUCH.

By St. Peter that is true, and I will seek no further.

EXORCIST.

Nevertheless, as it is thou that hast inquired of me touching this matter, I will say somewhat; for the man that hath nothing to say to his friend is too wise for this world.

EUNUCH.

Thou art a true friend to say so.

EXORCIST.

Attend then: when the Demoniac is brought before you, the first thing is to make sure that he is bona fide possessed: for which end you shall look for the Devil's mark in the form of a hare's foot, and when you find it run a lancet half an inch into the flesh; if no blood comes, it is a dead certainty he is possessed. The next thing is to bless the instruments, which are four; that is, water, incense, salt, and oil. Water is twofold; that is, first,

water of ablution, and second, water of aspersion. Water of ablution is sevenfold ; that is, first——

EUNUCH.

But tell us the manner of it.

EXORCIST.

The manners of it are three ; there is the præexorcization, the exorcization, and the postexorcization. The præexorcizations are fifteen ; that is——

EUNUCH.

Nay, I see it is past my understanding. But only tell me this,—how do you get the Devil out of a woman ?

EXORCIST.

You 've gravelled me there ; if once the Devil gets into a woman——

EUNUCH.

But you told me but now, speaking of her Highness——

EXORCIST.

Why look ye, the Devils that have to do with women are two, the Incubi and Succubi ; now for the Incubi——

[*Trumpets without.*

EUNUCH.

Hark! the troops are gathering; that is the imperial march; they are coming this way: we must be gone.

EXORCIST.

I fear some bloodshed will come of this.

EUNUCH.

I care not what comes of it; nothing new to this city, we may be sure.

EXORCIST.

No, unless it were peace and quietness, which I much mistrust. Farewell; shame the Devil, and renounce his works, and thou wilt never have need of my craft.

EUNUCH.

Easier to keep him out than to cast him out, if I know any thing of it. Farewell.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The European Shore of the Propontic.

ISAAC and ALEXIUS COMNENUS.

ALEXIUS.

But for that hair that 's twisted in the grain,
I had not known thee.

COMNENUS.

Youth, Alexius,

Knows nought of changes ; age hath traced them oft,
Expecta, and can interpret them. Thou too
Hast somewhat alter'd, but the few years more
Of time which I have travell'd through have taught
The art to know what has been from what is,
What 's like to be from both : change is youth's wonder ;
I have seen great things alter, precious things,
Boys become men, men monarchs, women fiends,
And girls too like them.

ALEXIUS.

There is nought thou 'st seen
More alter'd than art thou.
I speak not of thy change of outward favour,
But thou art changed in heart.

COMENUS.

Ay, hearts change too :
Mine has grown wond'rous sprightly.

ALEXIUS.

Hast thou forgotten how it was thy wont
To muse the hours away along this shore—
These very rippled sands ?

COMENUS.

The sands are here,
But not the foot-prints. Wouldst thou trace them now ?
A thousand tides and storms have dash'd them out,
Winds brushed them, and waves worn them ; and o'er all
The heavy foot of Time, who plods the shore,
Replenishing his sand-glass, trodden down
Their vestiges and mine. Look, here 's a rock—
His seat or ere he push'd it from the cliff,

And which shall now be ours ; a goodly seat ;
He's worn it smooth, smooth as a woman's cheek
Which he has not worn.

ALEXIUS.

That is smoother far—

COMMENUS.

Ere taught to dimple into lies. Come, sit.

ALEXIUS.

What is this carved upon the rock ?

COMMENUS.

I know not :

But Time has ta'en it for a poet's scrawl ;
He's razed it, razed it.

ALEXIUS.

No, not quite ; look here.

I take it for a lover's.

COMMENUS.

What ! there's some talk

Of balmy breath, and hearts pierced through and through
With eyes' miraculous brightness—vows ne'er broken,

Until the church hath sealed them—charms loved madly,
Until it be a sin to love them not—
And kisses ever sweet till they be innocent—
But that your lover's not put down ?

ALEXIUS.

No, none of it.

There are but two words.

COMNENUS.

That's succinct ; what are they ?

ALEXIUS.

“ Alas, Irene ! ”—Why, thy looks are now
Such as I have beheld them heretofore,
Only more ghastly—Iсаас, what disturbs thee ?

COMNENUS.

Now this I hate, to stand and be decipher'd,
Pored on and puzzled through,
Like riddles that are read o' winter's nights,
When maids and boys have nought to prate on else.
Alexius, forgive me. Leave me now.
There's occupation for us both abroad.

ALEXIUS.

Oh no, not now—I will not leave thee now ;
A seven years' history is untold between us.

COMNENUS.

All too heroic to be told in prose !
Go put it down in four-and-twenty books,
'Cleped "the Comneniad," to be read at leisure.
We 'll have no more of this ; my childhood 's past,
And I would not recall it.

ALEXIUS.

Not recall it !
Canst thou stand here and say so ? Canst thou look
On this soft-rolling, deep-embayed sea,
With yon blue beautiful ridge half compassed round,
Hear the lowplash of wave o'erwhelming wave,
The loving lullaby of thy mother Ocean,
(We, like the Cretan, are not sons of earth),
See the rocks stand like Nature's ruins round,
For man's were never so majestical,
The boundary forts of earth and ocean's empire,

The deep-scarr'd veterans of their countless wars,
Thy native, and thy fathers' native shores—
Are they not lovely ?

COMNENUS.

It is not the eye
To which these things seem lovely, but the mind,
Which makes, unmakes, re-models, or rejects them.

ALEXIUS.

And which doth thy mind ?

COMNENUS.

It hath done them all.

Alexius, I remember when in Persia,
I oft would watch the sun go down ; and there
He sets with such resplendency of red,
That the whole East, with the reflected glow,
Is crimson'd, as it may be here at dawn.
I would the youth of man did so decline ;
But that still darkeneth to the cloudy close.

ALEXIUS.

There is an after-dawn.

COMNENUS.

To that I look,—

Wont to look onward still, and never backward.

Thy coming hath deranged this.

ALEXIUS.

Let it rest.

How is our cousin Anna?

COMNENUS.

Well, quite well.

The natural infirmities of youth,

Sadness and softness, hopefulness, wishfulness,

All pangs for which we do not see good cause,

Let's take no count of. If I should call in

A doctor to a man of ninety years,

And ask the cause this rheum did so molest him,

What were the doctor's answer?—"Why this rheum?

"Pooh, Sir! all dotards drivell."—In like sort,

All maidens, that are maids at heart, are heart-sick.

Enough for doctors if they keep us sound

In the slow tide and tenor of our lives,

Between the intense of youth and lapse of age.

ALEXIUS.

A rumour went, our gentle cousin's charms
Were to have fill'd for thee this gap of life.
If she grew up with all I recollect
Of gifts that graced her childhood, none could match
her.

COMENUS.

I own it; but I have no care for beauty.
Seest thou yon rainbow based and glass'd on ocean?
I look on that as on a lovely thing,
But not a thing of promise.

ALEXIUS.

Doth she not love thee?

COMENUS.

That is a point to which most men would speak
In words of dubious import, to imply
That they are loved, but very loth to tell it.
I answer, she doth love me.

ALEXIUS.

And thou her?

COMNENUS.

Ay ;—with a difference though : her love's untold,
Though I am not so young in the world to doubt it ;
I tell her that I love her every day.
I have design'd her for a happier fate,
And she shall learn to love herself, not me ;
Which is soon taught.

ALEXIUS.

And wherefore not love both ?

COMNENUS.

Because she never can be true to both.
Hast no talk meeter for a battle's eve ?

ALEXIUS.

All is arranged ; there 's nought upon my mind.

COMNENUS.

Nor need there be ; but there is much on mine,—
A weight of foregone years crowding along,
That seem press'd back by some approaching close.
We 'll talk of times to come to-morrow night.
What time the watch is set I shall depart :
I mean to sleep besidè Blachernæ.

ALEXIUS.

Why?

Is 't not too near the walls?

COMNENUS.

I go alone.

And one at dusk will scarcely be observed.

ALEXIUS.

Take you no guard then?

COMNENUS.

Not so far as there.

I have a watchful eye to yon monks' kennel;
For, as I said, if aught be stirring there,
I 'll seize upon the post by break of day.

ALEXIUS.

You fear not for our sister?

COMNENUS.

But thus far:

I think when Pagans such as we make war,
My own is better than the Church's safeguard.

ALEXIUS.

My way is with you half the distance.

COMMENUS.

Good.

Macrinus then shall lead ; we 'll play the spy.
Let 's to his tent ; there must be orders given.
My armour too is there. Ere all is done
Dusk will be well nigh here, and we 'll set forth.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Evening.

An outpost of the Camp. Tents in the distance. Fires at intervals, reaching to the shore, and throwing light across the Propontic. Soldiers lying on their arms. In front a Sentinel walking his rounds is met by Alexius.

ALEXIUS.

Thou art one of Count Isaac's men, art not ?

SENTINEL.

How dost thou know that? Methinks by thy sunburnt face thou should'st belong to my Lord Alexius.

ALEXIUS.

True, I am from the east. But we are comrades for all that.

SENTINEL.

Yes; for we are all Count Isaac's men now, mind'st thou.

ALEXIUS.

True.

SENTINEL.

Count Alexius is now no more than second in command.

ALEXIUS.

No more.

SENTINEL.

And in so small an army that is next to nothing.

ALEXIUS.

'Tis little, but as much as he deserves.

SENTINEL.

Nay, I did not mean that ; only I would have thee understand that thy master serves my master.

ALEXIUS.

He does. There are few men worthy to serve thy master. I would that Count Alexius were.

SENTINEL.

Not that I mean any ill of Count Alexius. He's young, he's young.

ALEXIUS.

Ay, but one might be wiser even at his years.

SENTINEL.

Nay, I know not that. When I was two and twenty, I know not if I had much more sense than he has now. 'Tis a miracle how sense will grow upon a man after he has mounted guard a few years. Thou would'st not believe how many thoughts come and go in a wise man's head as he walks his four hours backwards and forwards upon an outpost.

ALEXIUS.

How long hast thou been walking here ?

SENTINEL.

The matter of an hour.

ALEXIUS.

And what thoughts have come and gone in thy head?

SENTINEL.

The matter of four.

ALEXIUS.

What was thy first thought?

SENTINEL.

I bethought me that the wind was easterly, and one
ought to hear the waves break upon the Symplegades.

ALEXIUS.

What was thy second thought?

SENTINEL.

I thought when the moon rose I should see the tops of
the fig-trees at Galatá; that's my birthplace.

ALEXIUS.

And thy third?

SENTINEL.

I thought if I was to fall to-morrow, I could like it
were thereabouts.



ALEXIUS.

Thy fourth?

SENTINEL.

I thought when Count Isaac was emperor, he would be for recasting the army ; and I should tell him I was getting old in the service, and could like to be one of the Immortals.

ALEXIUS.

That I 'll be bound for him thou shalt.

SENTINEL.

How canst thou tell ?

ALEXIUS.

I know he takes care of those that stick to their old generals, and look cold on the new.

SENTINEL.

How know'st thou that ? Thou art of the eastern forces.

ALEXIUS.

None knows thy master better.

Enter an Officer.

OFFICER.

My Lord, your brother waits you hard by where the roads meet.

ALEXIUS.

I come. Farewell to thee. See thou keep a keen look-out to the north and west. ~~The~~ moon will soon be up, and on the scout side of the field. All thou need'st take heed of comes between thee and the light. Farewell. I'll tell Count Isaac thy deserts.

[*Exeunt ALEXIUS and Officer.*

SENTINEL.

Holy Mother of God ! that will be the young Count himself. 'Tis well he takes it no worse ; for to say the truth, I did him but scanty justice. What was it I said to him ? No doubt but I told him plain out every thought that has come into my head for this year and more.

[*Exit.*

S C E N E III.

*A Churchyard.**COMMENUS, ALEXIUS, and Guide.*

COMMENUS.

This road is but ~~un~~. How is this?

GUIDE.

It is the burial-ground, my Lord. These hills are graves.

COMMENUS.

Then do we trespass ; but the dead ne'er heed us.

GUIDE.

Hush, my Lord.

COMMENUS.

I tell thee that they heed us not.

GUIDE.

Our feet

They heed not, and they hear not ; but some tell,

How a light word 's recorded till the day

When they shall burst their graves.

COMNENUS (*stumbling*).

Pray God it mend the road.

What be yon shape hewn out upon the tomb-stone ?

GUIDE.

A Cherub 'tis, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

What, with that damnable visage ?

GUIDE.

It is thus, my Lord, they carve them.

COMNENUS.

'Tis wondrous hideous. When I die, Alexius,

I 'll have an image of another mould

Shall smile a Cherub's blessing o'er my dust.

What, ha ! again—this rogue,

The blundering sexton, quite mistook his task,

And buried us the epitaph ; this stone

Hath but one knob above ground, which obtrudes

" Siste Viator" to who journey darkling.

Well, there 's a lesson when the tablet 's buried,

More than its scroll could read us. Sit we here.

This stone is new : there 's but one name inscribed,

And a long blank for chronicling the friends
Whose hour comes after. Why not write their names?
Then were the date but wanting. Look again—
“Here lieth” (say rather, here once lay)
“The body of Peter Andros, a true spouse
“And tender father—may the dust lie light . . .”
Why, look you there; the relict of this Peter,
(Whom I once knew) and his all-duteous sons,
Drove Peter hitherward e'er they bore him here;
And here they stood around the low-laid sire,
Echoing the hollow rattle of the mould
Upon his coffin-lid with hollow groans;
And then they wrote his epitaph,—a true one,
Which yet they lied in writing. Could we call up
The rings of mourners that have girt these mounds,
And bid them show their faces,—’twere a sight
That to behold the Devil should wax mirthful.
But they have follow’d.—What may be the name
Of yonder chapel?

GUIDE.

The chapel of St. Nicolaus Pontifex, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

Ay, is it so? Alexius, this place
I should have known, but that the dusk deceived me.
Once in this ground I saw a friend interr'd,
And I would fain revisit now the spot.
From hence I know my road. I'll follow you.

[*Exeunt Alexius and Guide.*]

This is the very earth that covers her.
Thus a bare chance will bring men to the spot,
Which they have shunn'd for years as haunted ground.
I do remember when I last stood here
Disguised to see a lowly girl laid down
Into her early grave, there was such light
As now doth show it, but a bleaker air;
For it was in December. It is most strange;
I can remember now each circumstance
Which then I scarce was conscious of; like words
That leave upon the still susceptive sense
A message undeliver'd till the mind
Awakes to apprehensiveness and takes it.
'Twas o'er,—

And the few friends she had beside myself
Had risen and gone ; I had not knelt, but stood
With a dull gaze of stupor as the mould
Was shovell'd over, and the broken sods
Fitted together. Then some idle boys,
Who had assisted at the covering in,
Ran off in sport, trailing the shovels with them,
Rattling upon the gravel ; and the sexton
Flatten'd the last sods down, and knock'd his spade
Against a neighbouring tomb-stone to shake off
The clinging soil,—with a contented air,
Even as a ditcher who has done his work.
I, at that sound, had started from my trance,
Conscious of its completion, but the keen frost
Had ta'en the power of motion from my limbs.
How I came thence I know not, nor dared ask.
But now I dare recall these things. Oh Christ !
How that which was the life's life of our being
Can pass away and we recall it thus !
Irene ! if there's aught of thee that lives,
Thou hast beholden me a suffering man ;

Thou'st seen the mind—its native strength how rack'd,
Thou see'st the bodily frame how sorely shaken,
And thou wilt judge me, not as they do who live,
But gently as thou didst judge all the world,
When it was thy world. — — — —
On many a battle's eve, in many climes,
By the ice-cavern'd course of black Araxes,
By Ister's stream, and Halys, and Euphrates,
By Antioch's walls, and Palestine's sea-shore,
I have address'd wild prayers unto thy spirit,
And with a mind against its natural bent
Tortured to strong devotion, have besought
That thou would'st meet me then, or, that denied,
That I might seek thy world upon the morrow.
And then it would have seem'd a thing most sweet,
Though awful, to behold thy bodiless spirit.
But now—and whether from the body's toil,
I know not if it be, or fever'd blood,
Or wakefulness, or from the mind's worn weakness—
It were a very terror to the flesh
To look on such a phantom :—it is strange

That what we so grieved to lose we fear to find
In any shape,—strange that the form so sweet,
So gentle and beloved, I saw laid here,
Now new-arisen would make my blood run cold !
Up, moon ! for I am fearful of the darkness,
And I do hear a voice that cries aloud—
Home, home, Comnenus !

[*A voice, at a distance, calling COMNENUS.*]

Where hath he a home ?

There is no home beneath a stone like this,
For lo ! it breaks in twain—these hillocks move—
God grant me mercy, how the graves burst round me—
Jesus, I own thy mission—mercy, God !

Enter ALEXIUS.

ALEXIUS.

Isaac, you stay too long.

COMNENUS.

Ha ! What ?—too long !

ALEXIUS.

What ails thee? what has happened?

I left thee but just now.

COMNENUS.

True, 'twas just now.

ALEXIUS.

And thou wert undisturb'd—

What has befallen since?

COMNENUS.

Ay, it was something that I saw just now.

ALEXIUS.

Thou speak'st without the concert of thy mind;

Collect thy thoughts; whence is this sudden change?

COMNENUS.

Be not alarm'd; 'twas but some idle thought;

We will dismiss it—merely a brain creation.

Think it no more: Alexius, as thou said'st,

I am a much changed man, and phantoms come

Before my sight most palpably like truths,

But going thus show clearly what they are.

We should survey yon villa on the left;
Some fifty men might hold it for an hour,
And cover our advance till Cos be won.
Come, let us onward. Why, thou stand'st amazed.

ALEXIUS.

Go on; I will not quit thee.

COMNENUS.

'Tis dawn by three o'clock; and ere that hour,
Macrinus will be up with half his force
As far as Ithe. I'll send word—but come—
The moon looms large, and shows our footing well.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

The Gardens of the Convent of St. Conon's.

ISAAC COMNENUS.

COMNENUS.

Midnight is past; yon western rim of light
Is sunken and absorb'd: yet darkness comes not.
The brow of Night is pale—pale, but how lovely!

Quieter far than life, than death less dark ;
A voiceless revelation of the things
Which lost their names when Eden was no more.

A VOICE BEHIND.

Cherub and Seraph, be your blessing here !

COMNENUS.

But, lo ! the names are left ; oblivion gulf'd
The nature, essence, notion—not the name.
So hallow'd be the all that earth lost not.
I, willing that all words should have their use,
Accepted these for watchwords.—Peace, come forth.

THE VOICE.

Cherub and Seraph—

COMNENUS.

Bring thy body forth,
So I may deem that heavenly voice incarnate.
Come forward, for I cannot bring my tongue
To rhyme thy pestilent jargon. Come, thou know'st me.

Enter the Monk MONOMACHUS.

MONK.

Deiparous Virgin ! Holy Mary Mother !

My Lord, you're louder than the bell for matins,
You 'll rouse the Brotherhood.

COMNENUS.

Which it did never.

MONK.

To come amongst your enemies alone !
It is mere madness, so I bade him tell you,
Periling alike yourself and me that screen you.

COMNENUS.

Thy counsel, whether I should come or not,
Was never ask'd ; I sent to bid thee meet me,
And finding thee am satisfied. Alone,
I have *not* come, save for the last half mile.
See'st thou yon upland ; in the dell beyond
A hundred horse are browsing.

MONK.

God defend us !

You do not purpose an attack ?

COMNENUS.

Not yet ;
Unless perchance my person were betray'd.

MONK.

Surely, my Lord, you question not my faith.

COMNENUS.

I cannot doubt that it behoves thee keep it.

MONK.

Pardon me there; though plighted faith still binds,
The rashness of the chief might cast in doubt
Which side be safest.

COMNENUS.

Not a whit, sir, no.

By whichsoever is espoused, by that
'Tis safest to abide. Be thou aware
It were a fatal error, shouldst thou dream
That thou couldst secretly espouse my cause,
And change thy mind at will, as things fall out.
Thou stand'st committed to the issue; yea,
My good or evil fortunes thou shalt share.

MONK.

My Lord, have I desired or more, or less?

COMNENUS.

And if, the while, cross tides shall run me hard,

And then some subtle spirit in thine ear
Whisper ‘change sides,’ with this shalt thou make head
Against that subtle spirit,—thou shalt say,—
“ Count Isaac, in his cunning malice, bent
That none be left unscathed if he be smitten,
May have bethought him to leave proof behind
Of all our dealings—proof whereof the tithe
Were all-sufficient in the Patriarch’s hands,
To doom me to that peace his Church accords
To her false brethren.”—In the hour of trial
Thus shalt thou fortify thy better mind.

MONK.

My Lord, a cruel stratagem is yours,
If I must needs believe this done, to fix
Your followers’ faith.

COMNENUS.

Invidious it were
To justify to thee the cutting off
Of that safe second turn which should ensure,
Lose they that might, a winning game to thee.
To justify is not my present need;

To have explain'd suffices.—By the night,
The complines have been done this hour, and now
My cousin might come forth.

MONK.

Not here, my Lord ;
The trees are ranker to the left, where now
She doubtless waits you : in the cloister near
Your sister will keep watch ; on this side I.
The path is at your hand.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

Another part of the same Gardens.

ANNA COMNENA.

Whate'er the cause, I'm glad we meet again ;
For our last parting was not to my mind—
A turning off as who should meet i' the road,
And bid good-morrow—nay not even that,
He did not say farewell, a word though sad,

One would not leave unspoken, still a sweet sound,
Though, it may be, a sound that parts for ever,
The dying cadence of a broken chord.
He did not say farewell, nor did he look it,
Nor kiss it, as he once, though not of late,
Was wont to do. I have outgrown the time
When all was unsuspected, unsuspicious.
Well is it said the best of life is childhood ;
Life is a banquet where the best 's first served,
And when the guest is cloyed comes oil and garlick.
How quiet is the night—no breath afloat—
I hear the kine upon the far hill side
Tear up the long dank grass. And such a morn
Will break the rest of this so peaceful night !
Hark ! what is that ?

COMMENUS (*entering*).

Curse on these birchen boughs ;
They waked a grey he-owl, who stared amain
To see one here who was not of his order.

Well met, fair cousin ! Short our time is here.
Wert thou afraid to come ?

ANNA.

Afraid ? oh no ;
I nowhere feel so safe as where you are.

COMNENUS.

Yet few men of a peaceful mind like mine
Have brought such dangers both on friends and foes ;
In no case wilfully ;
And now I strive to make an end of all.

ANNA.

Oh ! and a happy end, I trust, that then
We may have rest, and live in peace together.

COMNENUS.

Under his figtree each : so may it be !
Yet 'tis befitting us at this and all times
To look each issue fairly in the face.
The courage of the commonalty sinks
Unless their hearts be sanguine ; victory thus
Is in each general's mouth ; none cries

Courage, my friends, for wretched is your plight !
The chances are against us, Death and Defeat !
But by the common cry the common mind
Is buoyed aloft : be it not so with us.
Whatsoe'er possible evils lie before
Let us sincerely own them to ourselves,
With all unstinting, unevasive hearts,
Reposing in the consciousness of strength,
Or fervent hope to be endow'd with strength
Of all-enduring temper,—daring all truth.

ANNA.

I am courageous when you bid me be so ;
But were I left without a friendly voice
To strengthen and exhort me,—left alone
In some disastrous sequel of this strife,
I dare not say I should not falter then.

COMMENUS.

The worst assemblage of the worst events
When actual is not so intolerable
As when remote it seems : fancy o'ersteps
The bounds of nature, and miscounts the force

Of cumulative griefs; a first mishap
Has a fair field, the rest are but late comers.
The human mind's capacity of pain
Is no illimitable attribute.
What is it you most fear?

ANNA.

Oh! when I think
How many a brave adventurer r[emoved] arms
This last induction,—and what fates they met,
They who had won and reign'd falling in turn,
And then behold thee standing where they stood,
Upon the verge of empire or of —

COMNENUS.

Death,

Not execration, if the thought of that
Calls up these looks of horror. Fear it not.
To no such maim'd and ignominious close
Will I degrade my being. Life is now,
I think, with all its evils, eligible;
But one sense less would turn the odds against it.

ANNA.

But if this dread conjuncture should arrive,
You would not with your own hand cast off life?

COMNENUS.

Not so if others can be found : my wish
Has never been unneedfully to arm
My reason or my will against my instincts ;
What facile ~~guidance~~ nature gives I take.
In the sharp interchange of blow for blow
Our volatile life transpires at unawares
Without the thought of death, whose sting is thought.
The easiest permeation of mortality
Is this, and this, if need be, shall be mine.

ANNA.

Whilst I behold you standing by my side
So full of life, my mind will scarce be brought
Fairly to apprehend the fatal change
We speak of.

COMNENUS.

Death is but a name to you,
Who have but fancied hitherto, not felt

A deprivation. May it so remain !
To me, acquainted with mortality,
A foresight and forefeeling clear and strong
Present the image of the hour to come ;
And come when come it may, death comes to me
As a familiar spirit—not desired,
Neither eschew'd. Some three good hours ago
I pass'd a burial-ground, and pondering there
How much by accident it is we live
'Mid all the storms that wreck humanity,
I thought that something yet remain'd to do
To clear the coming hours of anxious thoughts ;
One possible issue unprovided for.

ANNA.

I have but contemplated two events,
Your victory, which quits us of all cares,
Or else your fall; and having proved the worst,
I shall thenceforth have nothing more to fear.

COMNENUS.

Though I should fall, defeat might not ensue ;
Alexius might win the crown and wear it.

My thoughts were on that issue, and therewith
I call'd to mind how Greatness shuffles off
The ties of blood, and oft divided hearts
Break up the fortunes of a new-made house.

ANNA.

'Twill not be so with ours.

COMNENUS.

That so it might not,
Is mainly what hath brought me here to-night.
Nought could secure Alexius on his throne
More than Eudocia's counsel ; which were lost
Should he receive a stranger's hand in marriage.
I know my sister's heart, and bear in mind
What comes of Aulic councils wherein strives
With an Augusta's will a Cæzarissa's.

ANNA.

The woman must be brave who thwarts Eudocia.

COMNENUS.

The Empress were high-minded who should not.
Audacious oftener than unenvious
Are women : of them all I know but one

By nature free from female jealousies,
In whom Alexius, should he wear the crown,
Would find a fitting consort. You are she.

ANNA.

I ! never, never ; oh ! no, never in me
A consort could he find ; me most unfit
For aught but meekly to await the end,
And mindful of my kindred with your house,
Weep or rejoice as ill or good betides.
In me a consort can he never find.

COMENUS.

And wherefore ? 'Twas in childhood you last saw him ;
When you survey him with a woman's eyes,
You shall confess no woman can resist him.
Oh childhood's independency of heart,
How art thou lost before the loser wotteth !
Why should we doubt the prompt and sure success
Of a good soldier like Alexius.

ANNA.

I love Alexius as his cousin ought,
But will not wed him ; and I say not this,

As many a maiden's protest has been said,
For a defiance ; nor does pride prompt me,
Who ne'er was independent of affections,
To say, what said shall bind me evermore,
That come what may, to him imperial honours,
To me distress, bereavement, all that's worst,
I will not wed Alexius.

COMMENUS.

How is this ?

You say you love him as his cousin ought,
And then forswear him and renounce his works,
With like devotion as he were the Devil.

How know you till you see him grown to man,
You may not worship him ; Armenian girls
Call him the Mithra of the middle world,
That sheds Eoan radiance on the West.

ANNA.

I mean'd not to disparage him ; oh no,
He was a gentle boy, of a kind nature,
And a quick fancy, and I loved him well.

But do not name him as but now you did ;
Despite myself, that turns my heart against him.

COMNENUS.

I say no more. When time is most to spare,
There is a sex in reasoning with whom
I never misemploy it. True it is
That divers motives, many a cogent cause,
Affecting first the empire, next yourself,
And lastly the Comnenian race, demand
Another strain of thought.—I press them not.
When these want weight change may be better hoped
From Passion's mutability.

ANNA.

Oh God !

The last words these may be we speak together,
And can you thus embitter them, and all
Only because I'm true to my own heart ?

COMNENUS.

Far be reproachful thoughts ! my fairest cousin
Shall be as faultless in my sight as fair,

Nor would it derogate from her fair perfection,
If she should hold her best affections free,
To change as times change ; with no wanton lightness,
Nor on vain pretexts, nor from those that *are*
To those that are *not* worthy ; but with judgment,
Having regard to who are dead, who live.
This only I would ask, but will not urge.
When the hour comes I spoke of (if it come)
Alexius will better press the pleas
Which I shall pass away from. Bear in mind
In after times what I have here let fall :
The seasonable time will come, though now
My counsel seem unsavoury.

ANNA.

Alas !

You speak as if you had no hope to live.

COMNENUS.

My way was through a churchyard, whence, as I said,
My thoughts have brought away a taint of death.
It is my wont upon a battle's eve
To invoke a spirit for my guide,

Which till to-night ne'er answer'd to my call.
What ! is the moon so high ? 'tis more than time
That I were in my camp. Farewell, my cousin.
Bloodless and blameless as thy life has been,
It is not much of ill that can befall thee.
Mine has been less so.

ANNA.

Oh my noble cousin !
If virtuous, just, and honourable living,
And gallant deeds could answer for man's weal,
Thine were not to be fear'd.

COMNENUS.

Not much the doubt
Comnenus would stand well with times to come,
Were thine the hand to write his threnody.
Yet is he in sad truth a faulty man.
In slavish, tyrannous, and turbulent times
He drew his lot of life, and of the times
Some deep and bloody stains have fallen upon him
But be it said he had this honesty,
That undesirous of a false renown,

He ever wish'd to pass for what he was ;
One that swerved much and oft ; but being still
Deliberately bent upon the right,
Had kept it in the main ; one that much loved
Whate'er in man is worthy high respect,
And in his soul devoutly did aspire
To be it all ; yet felt, from time to time,
The littleness that clings to what is human,
And suffer'd from the shame of having felt it.
But this is posthumous stuff ; talk for the tongues
That tell their tales when mine are all told out.
My gentle cousin, hie thee to thy covert.
An hour or two, and yonder Euxine Sea,
That slow induces its matutinal grey,
Shall then change colour like a maiden's cheek,
Enamell'd with the glow of other fires
Than those of sunrise. Bards, be on the watch
To blazon mighty deeds of mighty men !
Ye Gods, put back the hand upon the dial,
And stop the sun till I be on my horse ;
Nor, gallant steed, resent the unwonted spur

That bids thee know time presses. Cousin, good night ;
And whatsoe'er be told of me henceforth,
A most untruthful annalist were he,
Who said I did not love my cousin Anna.

ANNA.

Go, dearest kinsman : should we meet no more,
In many an hour of all my after life
Shall this be borne in mind most thankfully,
As kindness for a last memorial left me.
Go, and good angels guard thee is my prayer.

COMNENUS.

Good soldiers, cousin. In the arm of flesh
Are we to trust. The Mother of the Gods,
Prolific Mother, holiest Mother Church
Hath banded Heaven upon the side opposed.
No matter ; when such supplicants as thou
Pray for us, other angels need we none.
Now must my horse know nothing of the reins,
Until the warder's challenge sound a halt.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A Chamber in the Bucoleon.

*The Emperor NICEPHORUS, the Patriarch, and the Abbot
of St. Conon's.*

ABBOT.

I cannot but commend your Grace's prudence ;
She is a woman of ungovern'd spirit,
And were she in her helplessness so urged,
Might do some violence to herself, which still
Men's minds, more prone to scandal than to faith,
Would fix upon the Church. Count Lyra's death
Is yet a question and a calumny
Rife in men's mouths despite the miracle.

PATRIARCH.

It pleaseth God to hasten no man's hour
But straight our Order is impeach'd, as we
Could make men linger.

EMPEROR.

For our present need
Reserve we force until devices fail.

ABBOT.

I will take order for the strict observance
Of what your Highness saith.

EMPEROR.

Yet have regard
To what runs counter, what occasions serve.
In this time's mutability, the reasons
That rule one hour, the next doth abrogate.
Wherefore, by due observance of the times,
Mould thou the means, as best to work my end.
A woman and a child are easy dealt with.

ABBOT.

To work your Grace's will, and save the shrine



From the reproach of violence, I will try
All gentle and benign devices first.

EMPEROR.

And should those fail to draw the culprits forth,
Expect my further will. Enough is said.
They wait you in Sophia's.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Interior of the Church of St. Sophia.

The PATRIARCH standing before the altar with a taper.
Thuriferi swinging censers on each side. A number
of Priests holding tapers, and performing from time to
time the ritual deosculations of the images. A con-
gregation of old men and women.

PATRIARCH.

Lift up your voices, Oh my children ! call ye a curse
on Isaac Count Comnenus.

THE PEOPLE.

Lord, on this thine enemy deal thou thy vengeance !

PATRIARCH.

Curse him, ye Saints ! for he brake your images.
Curse him, Oh Jesus ! for he cast thy Eucharist to the
dogs.

THE PEOPLE.

Lord, on this thine enemy deal thou thy vengeance !

PATRIARCH.

Curse him, that he perish by the hands of thy servants !
Curse him, that he be trodden under the feet of the
horses ! Now, Oh Lord ! now instantly, smite him that
he die !

[*The people respond as before.*

PATRIARCH.

Visit him not in death with thy blessing. Cast his soul
from the gates of thy mercy. Not on him alone, Oh
Lord ! not on him alone ! Be thy curse on his blood, in
whosoever veins it floweth.

THE PEOPLE.

Lord, on these thine enemies deal thou thy vengeance !

Enter a Soldier.

PATRIARCH.

Whence comest thou ?

SOLDIER.

From Phenar in great haste.

The Emperor is sore ~~sick~~, and saith

Unless some aid be brought that all is lost.

PATRIARCH.

Who talks of loss that fighteth for the Lord ?

The people shall take arms and man the walls.

SOLDIER.

They will not arm. I saw them in the streets :

Prostrate before the images they lay,

Stricken with fear : the ways were fill'd with monks,

Passing in long processions to the shrines.

PATRIARCH.

Oh God ! raise up thy people. Lo ! I take

A blessed relic from Sophia's shrine !

This sword contains a scraping of the steel

Of that spear's head which pierced the side of Christ.
What host shall stand against the Lord of Hosts ?
Arm ye, my children, arm ye for the fight !
St. Theodore, St. Maurice, and St. George
Shall strike with them who strike with this dread sword.
Cast down your lights ; find weapons where ye may—
What host shall stand against this sacred sword ?

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

The City near the Walls.

A Soldier keeping ward. To him enter another running.

FIRST SOLDIER.

From what side comest thou ?

SECOND SOLDIER.

From Petræum, covered with laurels. There is no-

thing in war so glorious as a successful retreat. I have left the dead, but brought off the baggage.

[*Exhibits articles of plunder.*

I'll give thee this ring an' thou 'lt show me the nearest way into the sewers.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Dost take me for a scavenger? Thou art for slinking off.

SECOND SOLDIER.

I ! perish the thought! 'Tis a point of generalship. Didst never hear of a city being surprised through the sewers. If I were there, I could keep the pass against a thousand.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Indeed thou would'st keep it all to thyself, for the thousands are coming the other way—over the walls. But I'll take thy ring, for methinks I know what way thou cam'st by it; thou hast been killing and rifling thy wounded comrades. I'll take thy ring, and show thee the way to a safer place than the sewers—there.

[*Turns round suddenly and stabs him.*

Get thee underground, and give me up thy ill-gotten gear.

Enter several other Soldiers.

FIRST SOLDIER (*as he rifles the body*).

Good soul ! wounded to death I fear me ! The best of friends—a military testament—left me all he had—alas !

THIRD SOLDIER.

Truly, and no little either—ha ? Come, let 's have fair play. We will all go shares.

[*Enter an Officer : the soldiers quit the dead man and gather round him.*

OFFICER.

How fares it here ?

FOURTH SOLDIER.

The same as every where—ill fare ; it fares foully : the sally is beaten back to the walls.

OFFICER.

There was a rumour with us that a miracle had been wrought.

FOURTH SOLDIER.

The miracle of making live men dead ; the miracle of finding loaves and fishes for the worms. I like not such miracles.

FIFTH SOLDIER.

No ! thou art a loaf that will not stand to be sliced, and for a fish I think thou be'st no other than a flying fish.

FOURTH SOLDIER.

And not the only one if I be. I saw no miracle, except the old Patriarch among the foremost soldiers, with a rusty sword that came from Jerusalem.

OFFICER.

What did he with it ?

FOURTH SOLDIER.

Why, he held it up before the ranks, and prayed lustily. The enemy were shy of it, till Comnenus rode up and brake it in twain with his lance, and then they all fell on, and the sally was driven in.

OFFICER.

They say the Emperor was there himself.

FOURTH SOLDIER.

No man in the field fought better. This day has made a soldier of him again.

FIFTH SOLDIER.

Here is some one coming this way.

OFFICER.

It is the Emperor and the Eparchs. Jump on to yon wall ; you were best not be found doing nothing.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

The same.

The Emperor, Eparchs, and other Officers. The Patriarch.

FIRST OFFICER.

The sum of all is, he will have no truce.

EMPEROR.

Ay, but I'll bring him to another mind :

Return and say a Synod hath been call'd,
Which doth adjudge that by the Nicene canon,
The Church affords no sanctuary to those
She theretofore detru'd from her pale.
Add that in such sort as he grants conditions
Which may spare innocent blood, so shall I deal
With his heretical kindred.

[*Exit First Officer.*

The last attack told hardly, my brave friends;
Yet better than I look'd for. We'll not droop.

FIRST EPARCH.

Please you, my Liege, I think we had sped better
In this retreat, had there been none but soldiers.

SECOND EPARCH.

When first the monks came out, they gave some spur
To the fight; but after, when our line was turn'd,
They were a questionable aid: some stood
Like landmarks, others knelt, most ran
With much more haste than speed, and so disturb'd
The order of retreat.

EMPEROR.

The Patriarch's troops

Find little favour with my soldiers.

PATRIARCH.

Yea;

Harlots find favour with thy soldiers ; feasts,
Riotous feasts, find favour with thy soldiers ;
And therefore favour find they not with God.

EMPEROR.

Nay, nay, Lord Patriarch, let's not charge each other
With aught that hath befallen. Both did well.
May we so aid each other to the end.

Re-enter First Officer.

FIRST OFFICER.

May it please your Majesty, upon the road,
I learn'd the Count Comnenus had been missing.
The last who saw him said it was apart
From the main body, with the troop of horse

That drove some friars through the breach o' the east,
And thereabouts they found his shield and spear.

EMPEROR.

Then go proclaim thine errand on the walls,
And say, unless an hour shall bring reply,
St. Conon's is no sanctuary thenceforth
For any of his kin. Now to the trenches.

[*Exeunt Officers, Eparchs, &c.*

(*As the rest go out, the Patriarch detains the Emperor.*)

PATRIARCH.

An evil hour were this, should we invade
The Church's privilege, to prop her creed.

EMPEROR.

My Lord, extremity will force hard cures ;
'Tis vain to blink them.

PATRIARCH.

If none bethought them of an easier cure,
Thine adage should have weight.

EMPEROR.

See you not every outwork is abandoned ?
Nought but an instant truce can save us now ;

ISAAC COMNENUS.

[ACT IV.

... grant it only to redeem
... men's lives. So they shall to the walls,
... the sword fails to draw them forth,
... be brought by force.

PATRIARCH.

I grant they must.

... not said, that near the eastern gate,
... signs of Count Comnenus had been seen,
... himself was missing?

EMPEROR.

Such was the tale.

PATRIARCH.

... whose arms be found, for they will aid
... and, to spare the sanctuary
... irreverent force, too needful else.
... be look'd to.

EMPEROR.

Hark ! the signal sounds.

... looking behind.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

The Convent of St. Conon's.

EUDOCIA and ANNA COMNENA.

ANNA.

Hark ! cousin.

EUDOCIA.

I know that sound. It is the Uri's horn.

ANNA.

And look there: yon is not sunrise ?

EUDOCIA.

No. 'Tis the Greek fire on the other side of the hill.

ANNA.

Heaven ! is the attack begun then ?

EUDOCIA.

I trust in Heaven it is.

Enter the Abbot.

ABBOT.

I come, deputed by his Majesty,
Upon a gracious mission. I am to say,
He bears no grudge unto the fair Comnenæ,
Whom he holds faultless of this vile revolt.
Wherefore, to see them driven to this sad strait
Afflicts him sorely ; and with all respect,
He tenders an asylum in the palace,
Where they shall find all honourable accol,
And fitting safeguard.

EUDOCIA.

Let thy King be told,
I wait it from a greater King than he,
Isaac Comnenus, whom may God preserve !

ABBOT.

With your good leave, fair damsels, I would bear
Some seemlier greeting to my royal master.
'Tis fitting I point out a safer course.
Mine age, my holy calling do confer

The wish and duty so to interpose,
As might conduce to

EUDOCIA.

Hath the King been pleased
To signify his further will through thee ?

ABBOT.

He gave no further message.

EUDOCIA.

Nor do I.

[*Exit Abbot.*

ANNA.

Why dost thou speak so fiercely ?

EUDOCIA.

"Tis all one.

The time is passing, and the term approaching,
When swords are out soft words ne'er turn their edges.

ANNA.

Would it were day !

EUDOCIA.

I would it were ; this light
Shows the old monks as they were dead men walking.

ANNA.

I do not dread a host as I dread them.

EUDOCIA.

Look, here one comes. What is thine errand, monk?

The Monk enters.

MONK.

St. Conon's name be praised ! thy brother's taken.

EUDOCIA.

Who sent thee with that tale ?

MONK.

St. Conon's name be praised ! Lo ! hither come
His shield and spear. It is the Emperor's will,
That, as a meet oblation, they be laid,
With fitting rites, upon St. Conon's altar.

*Enter Monks in procession, bearing the shield and spear,
and chanting "gratias agimus." They lay them on
the altar, and, with the customary genuflexions and
thurifications, pass off.*



EUDOCIA.

Gallant Comnenus ! and is such thy fate !
The boldest heart in Christendom was thine,
And thine, as was thy due, the firmest friends
And faithfullest soldiers. What a ruin's here !
Now be our race extinct, for never more
A name so noble shall adorn its annals.
He said be bold and we should meet again ;
And Heaven shall witness that I have been bold,
But never, never as a captive,—no,
Not in captivity shall we e'er meet.
The term of princely durance is but short.

ANNA.

They cannot slay him—Oh ! no, no, they cannot.
The fiercest soldier would not lift his hand
Against Comnenus.

EUDOCIA.

Tempt not thou thy heart.
Yield not to hopes, but arm thee with despair.
The stake was noble—'twas the eldest crown
In Christendom, and which, if worn by him,

Had grown in splendour through a glorious reign.
The loss is great;—so might have been the meed.
It was a cause worthy my brother's sword.

ANNA.

Oh ! holy Father, say they will not slay him.

MONK.

The Emperor is merciful in judgment ;
Imprisonment may serve, with loss of eyes.
'Twere safe to blind him.

EUDOCIA.

Blind him ! slave of slaves,
Unworthiest to give utterance to his name !
Low in the dust must be Count Isaac's state,
When such as thou dare breathe thy blights upon him.

MONK.

Lady, 'twere good thou wert less splenetic ;
If thou couldst frame some more becoming speech,
And audience of the Emperor were obtain'd,
Or of the Lady Theodora, then

EUDOCIA.

I ask not audience of either—Hark !

'Tis a mere incoherency of mind
That angers me with such as thou—attend—
Thou bring me to the presence of the Count,
By any means thou wilt, and I bestow
This diamond thy reward.

MONK.

Then with all haste
Set forward to the ~~place~~.

EUDOCIA.

Who comes here?

Enter an Officer.

OFFICER.

I bear the Lady Theodora's signet,
And have it from her Highness in command
To say her bidding here.

EUDOCIA.

Say on, sir, speak.

OFFICER.

Her Highness gave command that to no ear

It should be utter'd, save to yours.

EUDOCIA (*to the Monk*).

'Thou hear'st.

[*Exit Monk.*]

OFFICER.

Your pardon, Lady, are there none else near ?

EUDOCIA.

What fear'st thou ? there is none.

OFFICER.

I come from Count Commenus.

EUDOCIA.

Thou from him !

Thou comest then from his prison. Where is that ?

For I am hastening thither.

OFFICER.

From his prison ?

Now God forbid that he should so be found !

His cause is hopeful.

ANNA.

What is it he says ?

His cause is hopeful !

EUDOCIA.

And if it prevail,
The first and only boon I ask of him
Shall be to truss me up these lying monks,
And sprinkle yonder altar with the blood
Of one most just and righteous sacrifice.
Where is Comnenus, sir?

OFFICER.

He bade me tell
How all things stood. Some spy brought word at dawn,
That Synods had been holden, and some ill
There was devised, which had respect to you.
The sallies from the gates to the south and east
Just at that hour grew hotter, but the Count,
Seeing the issue was on that side safe,
Call'd from the pursuit a few trusted friends,
Of whom I rank myself the humblest one ;
Their shields and spears they threw aside and crept
To some suburban hovels: there they drew
Above their armour the monastic garb,

Then sped as flying from the enemy,
And through a breach found entrance to the streets.
To wave suspicion then from shrine to shrine,
With crosses and mock-relics held aloft,
Through awe-struck multitudes they took their way,
With offerings for each altar. In due time
They will approach St. Conon's—whence the Count
Sware that no power should drive him till his flag
Were flying on Sophia's.

EUDOCIA.

It is perilous.

Will he cast off disguise and stand on force
So soon as he gains entrance?

OFFICER.

When the horns
Sound from the steep of Ergon, not till then;
But when they capture Ergon, thence the troops
Can aid us in good time.

ANNA.

Is he far off?

Where didst thou leave him?

OFFICER.

In the Kamian way:

There rumours reach'd him that himself was captured,
And soon perceiving from what source they came,
And to what end they tended, he, alarm'd,
Bade me divest my weeds, and with this sign
(A ring the Princess gave in former times)
Gain access here.

Enter an Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

All is prepared to take you to the palace.
The Father waits your coming.

EUDOCIA.

Let him wait.

Tell him my mind is changed. I will not go.

[*Exit Attendant.*

*Enter certain of the Brotherhood of St. Conon's, crying
“Kyrie Eleison—an offering for the Shrine.” The
Comnenians follow, cowl'd and stoled, with relics and
crosses, and their offering in a vase. They proceed
down the stage, and kneel before the curtain of the
Altar. Enter the Abbot of St. Conon's.*

ABBOT.

Thou must attend me to the palace.

EUDOCIA.

How!

ABBOT.

Ay—instantly. A rescript has arrived.

Thou and thy younger relative must go.

EUDOCIA.

Invade the right of sanctuary! what words
Are these to hear from Churchmen!

ABBOT.

It is vain.

A Synod hath been holden, and decrees
Your heresy hath forfeited the right.

EUDOCIA.

What if we dare dissent from such decree?

ABBOT.

The secular arm is ready to compel
Instant obedience. Soldiers wait without.
'Tis true the Church hath alway reverenced
The rights of sanctuary, when such protect
Offenders against human laws alone;
But when Almighty Heaven hath suffer'd wrong,
The Church dare show no mercy to the guilty.

[*Here one of the Comnenians, having advanced
gradually to the front, steps between the
Abbot and Eudocia.*

COMMENIAN.

Brother, of this the doctrine thou deliver'st,
I cannot tell thee less than that 'tis false.
It is a lying doctrine, brother—yea,
A doctrine which the Devil hath inspired
Into thy Synod, and which God abhors.

ABBOT.

And what art thou that thou shouldst interpose?
Am I not highest of mine Order here?

COMNENIAN.

I tell thee that thy words are not of God,
Nor shall the touch of secular force pollute
This holiest, as the best inhabited,
Of all God's dwelling-places here on earth.

ABBOT.

Thou contumacious monk ! what right is thine,
To say to me this shall or this shall not be ?
Ho ! the Varangian Guards ! thou shalt see proof
How what I do in this is countenanced.
Dost see this writing ? See'st the purple ink ?
A warrant in the Emperor's very hand
Doth authorize proceedings to this length.

COMNENIAN.

A stronger warrant in Count Isaac's hand
Doth stay them.

[*Throws off his disguise and draws his sword.*

The rest do the like.

ABBOT.

Treason ! Ho ! Varangians ! Help !

[*Exit.*

COMNENUS.

Let six defend each door. My valiant sister,

Well met in any hour ; and gentle Anna,

We shall find fitter time for gratulation.

Form into line.

[*The Comnenians form a line on each side, leaving a passage between them down to the Altar.*

My sister, not a man

Thou see'st before thee but in this day's fight

Deserved his knighthood. At the altar thou

Shalt take the safest station with our cousin,

And as you pass extend a hand to each

Of these your soldiers, which, as he receives,

He in his martial heart will pledge his faith,

Long as it beats with life to fight your battles.

EUDOCIA.

My gallant friends, may fairer hands than this

Be your reward, when this day's work is wrought.

[*COMNENUS leads EUDOCIA and ANNA between the lines down to the altar. The clash of arms is heard without, and the Varangian trumpets. COMNENUS draws aside the curtain of the altar.*

COMNENUS.

My sister, sit ye here. Ha ! what be these ?
Behold a miracle, my spear and shield !
Now, by the God of battles, this is strange,
Nor less auspicious. To the charge they go.

GUARDS *at the doors.*

The gates are not of strength ; we cannot keep them.

COMNENUS.

Back each man to his station. Keep them not.

[*Varangians defile through the gates. Horns are heard at a distance.*

CAPTAIN *of the Varangians.*

Behold the impious heretic himself !
Yield, or thy wretched band is hewn in pieces.

COMNENUS.

If thou wilt do that office on but one
Of them thou see'st, I pledge my royal word,
When I hang up thy rebel kind to-morrow,
To grant remission of thy forfeit head.
Enough of talking. Hark ! Comnenians, hark !

List ye the horns from Ergon. Now, fall on.

Down to the dust, idolators.

[As the fight begins, a cry of "Comnenus" is heard, and ALEXIUS enters at the opposite gates with his soldiers. The Varangians are driven out.

ALEXIUS.

Well fought, my friends ! the last of this day's fight.

Behold our flag is flying on Sophia's,

And ye may sheathe your swords ; the day is ours.

The COMNENIANS shout

Isaac Comnenus ! may he rule us long !

Long may the brave Comnenus wear the crown !

The COMMON SOLDIERS are heard crying confusedly

Proclaim him Emperor. Go, bring the crown.

Where are the purple buskins. Long may he live !

Long live Count Isaac !

ALEXIUS.

And where is Count Isaac ?

SEVERAL SOLDIERS.

Where is Comnenus ?

A SOLDIER.

When I saw him last,
He pass'd beside yon image of St. Conon.

ANOTHER.

Ay, and he struck the image as in sport,
And split the marble with his glove of mail.

ALEXIUS.

He has left us for the palace. Ah, Eudocia !
A happy meeting this, a happy fortune,
After long years of absence, thus to meet
My sister in the hour of victory.

EUDOCIA.

May like success be ever with your arms !

ALEXIUS (*to Anna*).

My gentle cousin, be this homage thine,
From all the Eastern empire. Friends, repair
To the imperial palace ; as ye go,
Proclaim Count Isaac Emperor through the streets.
Sound the Comnenian march. Now, all set forth.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

An Apartment in the Prisons.

NICEPHORUS (*alone*).

Morn, let me meet thee face to face once more.
Thou look'st upon me with an unmoved front ;
The pale cold aspect of a wearied friend.
Such are the world's mutations. I had deem'd
The remnant of a life that I have left
Might pass in peace, such as beseems old age ;
But oh ! th' infirmities of age in Kings
Cripple the body politic. First fails
Life's vigour at the heart, a numbness next
Seizes the weak extremities of empire ;
Then some old sore breaks out, and all at once
The nice adjustments of the strong-knit frame
Dissolve like rotted ligaments asunder.

Enter MANUEL.

MANUEL.

If it please your Majesty, you'll remember me.

NICEPHORUS.

I know thy lineaments, but thy name escapes me.

What is thine occupation?

MANUEL.

Oh, the stars!

Bethink yourself. What, is it not ten years

That I have shaved and shaved you day by day?

NICEPHORUS.

True, I remember thee; I know thee well.

What farther?

MANUEL.

Nay, in truth I know not. Hey!

No state of man is steady; all things change.

I guess you're thinking now of former times,

Calling to mind how brave Bryenus fell,

And Basilacius; but then Ducas lived:

A jovial Emperor was he, and straight

A Cœnobitic Friar. Strange reverse !
He bore it with an equal mind, unchanged
In outward cheer : but this he told his friends,
The abdicating flesh-meat vex'd him sorely.

NICEPHORUS.

Thou wert a less unapt remembrancer,
If thou shouldst sound these topics in the ears
Of the usurper, not the King discrown'd.

MANUEL.

I swear upon the Cross, there's not a spot
(Save here below ground) all the city through,
Where Stentor's self could hear his own tongue speak.
The shout is on all sides, " Long live Comnenus !"
Who, strange to say, is nowhere to be found.

NICEPHORUS.

And saw'st thou anywhere a friend of mine ?

MANUEL.

Alas the day, Sir ! as I came along,
His Highness, the great Logothete . . . ten days
No steel has touch'd his beard . . . Great men, said he,
(I had it from his chamberlain) great men
Must in these times neglect their private cares.

NICEPHORUS.

What of the Logothete? unhappy fate!

So many in my fall——

MANUEL.

Too true, too true.

I said, that being, as it was, not right,

No good would come on 't.

NICEPHORUS.

What is his fate?

MANUEL.

Half down the Caspian way,

Buried beneath the ruins——Lord! the head

That he put out, all matted, bruised, and bloody!

NICEPHORUS.

Poor, good old man! Thou villain, what's thine errand?

What art thou groping for within thy pouch?

Thou 'rt sent to murder me.

[*Seizes him.*

MANUEL.

My gracious Lord!

Hear me, your Majesty! oh! mercy, Sire,

You are deceived. Alas! my Lord, forgive me!

The Lord Macrinus sent me——'t is the tonsure——

NICEPHORUS.

Thy terror kills thee. Go, 't is plain enough
Thou art not for such service. Hence, begone.

MANUEL.

An it please my gracious Lord, the doors are fast.

NICEPHORUS.

I hear a grating at the outer gates,
There's some one comes;—but here's such scanty
light—

[*The door is opened, and MANUEL goes off past
the person who enters.*

Who stands within the Emperor's prison doors?

COMNENUS.

Isaac Comnenus.

NICEPHORUS.

Thou art welcome, Count;
More welcome to my prison than my palace.

COMNENUS.

I know it. Never was I welcome there.
Had I been less obnoxious to thy sight,
I had not sought thy fall. Nor seek I now

Thy further fall than what defence demands.
I would give room unto thy shortening days,
To gather in the after-math of life.
I wait thy answer.

NICEPHORUS.

Count, it may seem strange
To thee, as sometimes to myself it seems,
That being from my high imperial state
So low deposed, the nearest of my friends
Laid lower still, if lower that state be,
Which the grave darkeneth to our repute ;
My name, that hath had reverence heretofore,
Become a common theme, when common men
Would feed their malice, or make known their charity :
I say it may seem strange, that being thus
A desolate and disconsolate old man,
Life should to me be acceptable still.

COMNENUS.

My pledge is given, that life be not denied.

NICEPHORUS.

At threescore years and twelve, the boon of life

Man can impledge to man may well be deem'd
A thing of small account. I take thy gift.

COMNENUS.

Gladly I find there's aught I have to give
Worth thy acceptance. One condition yet
Demands fulfilment, that the crown be safe;
For to that end provision must be made,
That in some sort detracteth from my grant.

NICEPHORUS.

Imprisonment I am content to brook:
It is an ill which age itself brings on,
Barring the wrongs of Fortune. An old man
More meekly may endure it.

COMNENUS.

Somewhat else
Remains for stipulation. While thou hold'st
Thy station in men's minds, as being still
One of an order capable of empire,
Thy friends will breed expectancy of change.

NICEPHORUS.

Friends was thy word? in truth, an empty fear!

My friends ! In thousands yesterday at dawn,
Like leaves in summer, did they hang on me ;
But ere night fell, as with a winter's blight,
They were abroad upon the several winds.
Now, by God's name, it grieves me to the heart,
They were not sepultured in yonder trench.

COMNENUS.

Be it thy friends are friends of him who reigns,
Thy malcontents will soon be such to us ;
And every disaffection that may grow,
Take the good name of loyalty to thee.

NICEPHORUS.

What surety would'st thou have ?

COMNENUS.

Assume the tonsure.

The service of the Church, whilst it forbids
The thoughts men might attach to thee of empire,
Becomes thy latter days.

NICEPHORUS.

Ay, doth it, Count ?

Hast thou forgotten, in thy feast of power,

The tenor of the life thou'dst have me close
In this ignoble servitude—the Church !
Dim though they be, these latter days of life,
I quickly call to mind the glorious time,
When first amidst Mount Rhodope's defiles
A Thracian soldier I took spear in hand.
The Church ! I thank thee for the villainous word
That tells me what a soldier hath deserved,
Who stoop'd to ask conditions from his foe.

COMNENUS.

I meant no contumely. A fitter time—

NICEPHORUS.

No more—I see thee not again—henceforth
All that the Emperor seeks of Count Comnenus
Is that his latter hours be undisturb'd.

COMNENUS.

Farewell: but should thy meditations bring
Another mood of mind, spare not to speak it.
Thy summons I will instantly attend.
Again farewell.

[*Exit.*

NICEPHORUS.

My life hath been such life as kings must bear,
Who would be more than pageants : it hath been
A life of anxious, strenuous thought, and deeds
That sprang from such : yea, and all men must say,
Howe'er I govern'd, it was I that govern'd :
No minister hath play'd the monarch here.

I have sway'd nations—not by mere kingly power,
But intellectual ; such as would have sway'd
The minds around me had I *not* been King.

My single destiny is all that now
Remains for me to govern ; nor shall I
Be found unequal to this final charge.

How many times in youth a violent death
Seem'd imminent, yet brought me no alarm.
And now the loss of so much less of life,
And that less portion of less rateable worth,
Would surely not seem fearful, but that age
Counts with its ills tenacity of life,
The long inveterate habitude of living.

Enter THEODORA.

My daughter, com'st thou to console thy sire?
Thy filial duty hath not been o'erpaid,
But such a time as this were ill employ'd,
In aught but kindly speech.

THEODORA.

Father, I come
In this most bitter hour to aid thy counsels.
I have not used (and therefore hath our love
Held heretofore a not unbroken course)
All words of tender import which are rife
In women's mouths; and if I had such now,
What could they profit thee?

NICEPHORUS.

What hast thou better?

THEODORA.

Daggers.

NICEPHORUS.

Hush! hush! that is no woman's word.

THEODORA.

Yea, 'tis a woman's word, and woman's weapon.
But there are hands to hold them more than mine,
Though there be none more steady. Time runs out.
The menials of the palace as I came
Were busied with the coronation feast.
Grant that a woman's doom had laid i' the dust
The head which they would crown.

NICEPHORUS.

Why be it granted.

Deem'st thou the difference of a single head
Shall quell a reigning faction? Had the blow
Been struck while yet the victory was in doubt,
Their leader lost had been the loss of all;
But now 'twere a miracle if they kept not
What he hath won.

THEODORA.

Father, thine years benumb thee.

Wherefore is this? the Patriarch wears a coil
Of twenty winters more, yet his blood 's hot;
And I, a woman, do not yet despond.

NICEPHORUS.

The Patriarch's fury blinds thee to his dotage.

I tell thee there 's no hope.

THEODORA.

Thou wilt not hear ;

The Cohort which deserted yesternight

Met with a cold reception from the Count ;

Wherewith but ill-content, this day they 've sworn

To rise in arms upon the Patriarch's call.

All now is loose, the townsmen and the troops,

None careful but the conquer'd. One blow struck

Confounds them in their mirth.

NICEPHORUS.

This old man's dream

Which he hath told thee doth portend nought else

But that a night of blood will interlope

Ere the Comnenian dynasty begin.

THEODORA.

My father, hear.

NICEPHORUS.

Go to ; I know too well

That Chief who now doth keep an eye o'er all,
Be feasting they who will.

THEODORA.

Then cling thou still
To thy despair. I go, and soon or late,
Here in thy cell, or on thy throne resumed,
A tale will reach thee of a bolder deed
Than e'er was done by our most martial Sires
Upon the Thracian hills:—
Father—thy blessing.

NICEPHORUS.

Oh ! my child, much grief,
Sore trouble hast thou brought me in my time ;
But I forgive thee now, nor may I blame
This enterprise, all hopeless though it be.
Take thou thy Father's blessing and depart.
I in the inner chamber will go seek
That rest the time doth bid me to. Farewell.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

*A Street near the Palace.**ISAAC COMNENUS and MACRINUS meeting.*

MACRINUS.

Count Isaac, by my life ! Well met, my Lord—
Your Majesty the word is—pardon me
If my first meeting with my Sovereign Lord
Be something overjoyful.

COMNENUS.

Good Macrinus,

There 's none entitled to a larger share
Of whatsoe'er of joy this hour affords.
Where is my brother ?

MACRINUS.

In the Palace, Sire,

And with the rest awaiting you.

COMNENUS.

And where

Have you disposed the soldiery ?

MACRINUS.

They crowd,
And with them half the city, to the Square
Before the Palace ; all expectant wait
To see you crown'd ere they lay by their mail,
And close the glorious day with revellings.

COMNENUS.

Something too soon, Macrinus. And my guards ?

MACRINUS.

They are within, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

So far is well.

Are those deserters look'd to ?

MACRINUS.

Which, my Lord ?

I knew not that a single friend proved false.

COMNENUS.

Ay ; but the false proved friends.

I mean that Mæsian cohort which betray'd
Their post to Count Alexius.

MACRINUS.

By my faith,

I think they were but now before the gates ;
A Lombard shirt of mail they wear, and sword
Much like a Frank's—I mark'd them there but now.

COMNENUS.

March out my guard, and let them be disarm'd.

MACRINUS.

'Twill cause much discontent, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

Why so ?

They 'll share the donative ; so say, Macrinus.

I will reward them, but I will not trust them.

MACRINUS.

It shall be done, my Lord. And will you then
Permit the impatient multitude to see
Your coronation solemnized ?

COMNENUS.

On that

I had a word to say

Well, 'tis no matter.

The Count Alexius, said you, was within ?

MACRINUS.

He is, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

He is a noble youth.

MACRINUS.

Indeed, my Lord, he is.

COMNENUS.

And a good soldier.

MACRINUS.

There 's not a man on either side fought better.

He has a martial heart.

COMNENUS.

And therewithal

The rapid eye, ubiquity of presence,

And quickness, and collectedness of thought

Which give a natural command in war.

MACRINUS.

He has, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

For he was from a boy

By care taught conduct. No state-weakling he,

Born in the purple, and so bred a fool.

He is, though young, well practised in affairs.

MACRINUS.

Surely, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

In him there is besides

The strong vivacity of youth and health,
With something of a gallantry of spirit
That wins upon the multitude.

MACRINUS.

Most true.

The troops he has commanded love him well.

COMNENUS.

A word with thee, Macrinus——

Hark ! the throng
Are shouting out my name.

MACRINUS.

My Lord, they 're eager
To hail your presence, and acclaim you King.
There never was a people so o'erjoy'd,
Nor ever yet a city that so rang
With acclamations : not a troop files by
With the Comnenian standard, but the shout

“ Long live the Emperor Isaac” peals on high,
As from a thousand voices in one breath.
Long may he live and reign !

COMNENUS.

My good Macrinus,

There's more mortality about this frame
Than known to those who tell its term of years.
The worm within may make the building weak
Ere Time has leant his weight upon the walls.
Well; let us to the palace. I had meant—
But it avails not. From the terrace walk
Above the palace gates I'll speak some words
To thee, to Count Alexius, and the People.
So let us to the Palace. But disarm
The Mæsian Cohort first, forget not that.

MACRINUS.

I'll lose no time, my Lord.

{ *Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

*A Suburb.**THEODORA and an Officer of the Mæsian Cohort.*

THEODORA.

Who wrote this quavering scrawl?

OFFICER.

It is the Patriarch's, Lady.

THEODORA.

It is like.

Old age hath stricken him. I cannot read it.

OFFICER.

As I guess, my Lady,

His Holiness would see you.

THEODORA.

Wherfore so?

OFFICER.

I know not ; he is muttering evermore,

But none can tell his drift. He lies at length

Upon a pallet in St. Cyril's cell.

*

THEODORA.

This day hath overwrought his aged spirit.
I will attend him. Keep thy men together,
And send me instant word of all that haps. [Exeunt.]

SCENE IV.

A Chamber in the Palace. EUDOCIA standing at a casement. ANNA sitting near an Attendant, who is dressing her hair.

EUDOCIA.

Look, Cousin, look ! for a more princely pageant
Ne'er blessed a maiden's sight.

ANNA.

I'm sick of shows.

What dost thou see ?

EUDOCIA.

The troops, a host in arms,
Fill up the Palace Square, and them beyond,
As far as eye can reach, the multitude

Throng through the ways. Hail to that silken flag,
The proud Comnenian banner ! Long may it float
Triumphantly above yon Palace gate !

ANNA.

Thy heart is in the pageant ; thou wert wont
To taunt thy sex that they were all for shows.

EUDOCIA.

My heart ! ay, every pulse of it that beats ;
And call'st thou this a show ? I tell thee, girl,
That were these squares and palaces black dust,
These ways more desert than the Palmyrene,
And were all silent, save the mouse-bat's wing,
So that our banner waved above the waste,
My triumph would be full.

ANNA.

Well ; be it so.
Heaven knows I meant not to reprove thy joy.

EUDOCIA.

I see him,—there he comes, and close beside
The princely boy Alexius.
Saints ! there an Empire shouted.

[*The acclamations of the multitude are heard.*

ANNA.

Now they're still.

How suddenly it ceased.

EUDOCIA.

He speaks to them.

I saw him wave his hand.

ANNA.

Would we could hear him !

EUDOCIA.

I heard him once address some mutinous troops.

'Twas with a grace so winning, yet so fearless,
That their ferocious clamour died away,
And when he ceased, they cried " Long live Comnenus ! "

ANNA.

See, from their hands he takes the diadem.

What means he now ?

EUDOCIA.

Look ! Look ! he puts the crown
Upon the head of young Alexius.

ANNA.

Hark !

They shout again, and canst thou not discern
“ Long live Alexius” is the burthen now ?

EUDOCIA.

He has transferr'd the Empire ! as I live
Discrown'd his proper head ! *(A pause).*

It is not well.

My life long have I look'd to see him King,
And much I sacrificed to make him so,
And thousands sacrificed no less from whom
Much less was owing, and have they no claim
Who ventured—much or little—all they had,
Or might have, or might hope to have, for him—
Have they no claim to service in return ?

ANNA.

But if Alexius live they will not want it.
He will be good and generous to them all.

EUDOCIA.

Alexius ! who 's to govern in his nonage ?

ANNA.

They ope the gates : the multitude throng in :
Some one approaches.

EUDOCIA.

Isaac, by his step.

Enter COMMENUS.

COMMENUS.

You stay too long; the tables are all spread.

EUDOCIA.

Where is thy diadem?

COMMENUS.

'Tis given away.

No more about it—there's a feast below.

EUDOCIA.

It is not well to balk thy triumphs thus,
And cheat the friends who aided thee to rise.
All was endured for thee—ay, in the hope
That this which hath come would come,—that this hour
Of full regality would crown the ascent,
The perils of the upward path were braved.

COMMENUS.

Eudocia, be content. I could not reign.

EUDOCIA.

Not reign ! Who says not thou wert born to reign ?

COMMENUS.

I am not of that mind ; of what hath been,

I can say boldly I was born to that ;

More I can not,—unless it be worth while

To predicate that I was born to die.

Engraft, my sister, on a greener stock

Thy love and pride, and they shall flourish long :

Thou knowest that decay wins on apace

With that from which thy earlier hopes drew life.

Alexius is docile ; him thy care

Shall train to empire, him thy counsel teach,

As counsel is there none by which in straits

I half so much have profited. Now first

I need it not ; for henceforth there is none

Can be of council with me. I transfer

That with the crown, a not unequal gift,

Nor ill assorting with imperial power.

EUDOCIA.

I know thee not ; so all unroyal now

That rose to royalty so gloriously—
Now when all men are gazing at thy height,
As at a ruling planetary power.

COMNENUS.

I never, even when a boy, desired
To be star-gazed of men.* Thou couldst not think it.
What I desired—this day has been fulfill'd;
The living of my race are safe and free;
The dead are not dishonour'd,—some firm friends,
And many loose adherents will be paid
The value of their service more or less.
This was desired and this was done, or will be;
And being done, I know not that I owe
To dead or living of mankind aught more.

EUDOCIA.

And how wilt thou dispose thy future life
To profit more thyself?

COMNENUS.

Of that hereafter.

Alexius must feast his Lords below,
And you assist him. I must give, meanwhile,

Some needful orders, and survey the posts
Or e'er the night waste further. Fare you well.

EUDOCIA.

My noble brother, you depart abruptly.
I said not aught ungentle; if I did,
You know that I have loved you from your birth.

COMNENUS.

Not an ungentle word—not one that seem'd so.
I'll seek your chamber ere we sleep, and court
Some further conference.

EUDOCIA.

I know not why,
But I am loath to see you leave us. Well:
It must be midnight ere you can return;
But do not fail me then.

COMNENUS.

About that hour. [Exit.

EUDOCIA.

Oh! I forgot—but he is gone.

ANNA.

What is it?

EUDOCIA.

I wish'd to tell him he should take his guards.
The city is disorderly—no matter;
We'll send Macrinus.—Are you ready?—come.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.

A Cell in the Ruins of a Convent.

The PATRIARCH reclining on a pallet.

Enter THEODORA.

THEODORA.

All goes as we would have it, Holy Father;
The Mæsian men stand firm, and nought transpires.

PATRIARCH.

Who is it—Ha? Who's there?

THEODORA.

Most Reverend Lord,
Arouse you and look up. Our purpose thrives.

PATRIARCH.

I say again who is it? Speak, who is it?

THEODORA.

The Lady Theodora.

PATRIARCH.

Theodora?

What, hast thou stricken him? reach me thy palm.

Lo! there's no blood; 'tis ashy white all over.

The Lady Theodora—why then speak—

Say—hast thou dealt the blow?

THEODORA.

Father, not yet;

The hour has not yet come.

PATRIARCH.

Not yet, not yet?

That ever was the cry—when I said strike,

Some coward came between and said 'not yet.'

THEODORA.

Compose thy mind; the season is at hand,

And duly as the day and night go round

The work shall be fulfill'd; for deeper vows

Than ever pilgrim pledged his soul withal
Devote me to this deed.—He hears me not.

PATRIARCH.

Bring holy water, that my hands be cleansed.
The Father of the Church this day hath slain
Seven men in battle;—be his sins absolved.

THEODORA.

Christ! that his senses should forsake him now;
At once, and in this need! Arouse thy mind:
Father, Comnenus reigns: this very hour
He will be crown'd. Bethink thee of the hour.

PATRIARCH.

Think'st thou I hear thee not—beshrew thy shouting—
I bade thee smite him, and thou brought'st me back
A pair of lily palms, and saidst ‘not yet.’
But hark! his soul is cared for: ‘twas my charge,
And I have tended it: die when he may,
There is a weight on that—Help! I am slain—
What traitor drove that spear—Soft, let me lie.

THEODORA.

Great God! is this his death-stroke?

PATRIARCH.

Let me lie—

Let me lie down.

THEODORA.

There's nought to bar my Lord;
Pray you lie down. His back's as stark as steel.
He is convulsed—Friends, help! help, without!

Enter a Maeonian Officer.

OFFICER.

I greet your Highness with but evil news—

THEODORA.

Peace with thy news—see'st not the Patriarch ta'en
With the death-struggle? help to lay him down.
Soft, he's more placid now. Go, call the priests.

[*Exit the Officer.*

Lo! his eyes open wide:—how now?

PATRIARCH.

Methought

That there was some one dying in this house.

Who may it be?

THEODORA.

Nay, turn your thoughts elsewhere.

Call on Lord Jesus, and his holy mother.

Think thou wert ever stedfast in the faith,

And may'st have hope of grace. Here come the priests.

Ill may I do their office.

Enter Priests.

FIRST PRIEST.

Much I fear,

The life has left him. Open thou his vest.

The pulse is gone—gone utterly—alas!

The soul 's departed.

THEODORA.

"T was with an awful strife.

Take forth the body.

SECOND PRIEST.

Lo, beneath his vest,

Here is a wound still bloody, and received

Doubtless in this day's fight.

FIRST PRIEST.

And here are scars
Of wounds received long since. Men wont to say
His youth was spent in a more carnal calling.
Some blood was spilt in stifling of that tale,
And we may mark he spared the surgeon's aid,
Rather than show these scars. So—bear him out.

[*Exeunt Priests with the body.*

THEODORA.

This is a dreadful hour. An awful end
Was that old man's, and, if all tales be true,
Many a dark deed his soul is charged withal.
—A dreadful hour, to usher in an act
That may lie heavy on the soul hereafter.

Re-enter the Officer.

Thou didst not speak thine errand.
Now I can hear thee.

OFFICER.

By Count Isaac's order,
The Mæsians have been suddenly disarm'd.

THEODORA.

Disarm'd ! and they resisted not ?

OFFICER.

Their chief

Had been entrapp'd before, and when they heard
That all should have an equal share of spoil,
They gave their arms.

THEODORA.

My father's words come true.

OFFICER.

A few were headstrong, and amongst them I
In cover of a tumult which ensued,
Took sword in hand, and brake away to you.

THEODORA.

Enough, sir ; I discharge you from all dues
Of future service.

OFFICER.

I shall ever hold
My service at your Highness's command.

THEODORA.

I thank you ; for I did not look to find
In such extremity a friend so true.

My last memorial for service done
Is this; nor could it be bestow'd more fitly.

[*Giving a ring.*

Now, sir, farewell; our common cause expires;
What may remain is Theodora's only,
Who executes henceforth her own behests.

[*Exit the Maesian Officer.*

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Alas! your Highness, there is grievous news;
My Lord, your royal father——

THEODORA.

What of him?

MESSENGER.

By his own hand has died.

THEODORA.

My father dead!

MESSENGER.

The warden found him almost cold and stiff;
He had been dead an hour.

THEODORA.

No marvel this.

To him the bitterness of death was past.
He has done well and wisely. In the world
He had no more to do. There yet remains
A task of mine unfinish'd. Now, to work. [Exeunt.]

SCENE VI.

A large Hall, leading to the Banqueting Chamber in the Palace, from which Guests are passing out at intervals. The Hall is filled with Attendants, &c. and in front are the Steward of the Household and THEODORA, as a Suitor, in a deep mourning dress, with her face veiled.

STEWARD.

Stand all aside; the guests are coming out.
What wait'st thou for? make way there, ho! make way.

THEODORA.

I wait for Count Comnenus.

STEWARD.

He's not here.

THEODORA.

He's coming here.

STEWARD.

I cannot tell. Stand close;

Count Cataculo coming out—make room—

That brave commander—noble Cataculo.

THEODORA.

Is he *not* coming here?

STEWARD.

I cannot tell.

He ne'er was well affected to a feast,

And speaks irreverently—friends, stand back—

Of wine that's older than himself—room ho!—

The only sin that I can charge him with,

God save his soul in heaven!

THEODORA.

Amen, amen.

STEWARD.

Paleologus coming out—St. George!

That bark 's deep laden ; Scian wine 's aboard ;
 Yon was a heavy lurch.

PALEOLOGUS.

Good friends, good night.

Your servant. Let me hold you by the arm ;
 For, pardon me, you seem to walk but so so.
 But never mind, I 'll steady you ; I 'm sound ;
 No milksop neither ; but I hold it good,
 That alway one keep sound to help the rest.
 So,—steadily—on this side of that lady—
 This side the lady in the grave-clothes—Ha !
 This side the apparition—cleared, by Jove !
 And so a fair good-night to ghosts in black.

(*Going, returns.*)

And tell Count Isaac, I forgive Count Isaac
 For being thrifty of his bounteous presence ;
 For I 've a guess, a shrewd one, mark ye me,
 A shrewd conjecture of the why and wherefore,—
 And to be wise, and say no more about it,
 I think it may be he 's too drunk to come. [Exit.]

THEODORA.

Hark ye. The matter that I bring Count Isaac
 Concerns his life.

STEWARD.

How mean you ?

THEODORA.

Yea, it doth.

The scurvy citizens are not content,
And ever and anon some knave cries out
His house is plunder'd, and Count Isaac's men
Have eat his supper and debauch'd his wife.
Then lays the rogue his hand upon his hilt,
And turns the matter in his beggarly mind,
Feeling dissatisfied : so walks he forth,
And no one's eye is on him.

STEWARD.

In good truth,

Thou hast described a dangerous man. I'faith,
Your hungry men are very dangerous ;
They have no charity for us that eat.
I ever said, put hungry men in prison,
Else you shall surely have them discontent.

THEODORA.

Yet for the time thou see'st they go at large,
Since no offence is yet committed.

STEWARD.

None?

What call ye then the lack of charity?
The lack of Christian charity? What, none?
By my salvation, it's a foul offence,
A most nefandous error, which begets
Much danger to us powers that be.

THEODORA.

I say

There is a danger nearer to the Count
Than any of you wot of. Where abides he?

STEWARD.

He will be here anon, and thou shalt see him.
Away. The guests are rising all. Away. [Exeunt.]

SCENE VII.

The Banqueting Chamber.

Enter ISAAC COMNENUS and MACRINUS, with an Attendant.

COMNENUS.

The guests have all departed?

ATTENDANT.

All, my Lord.

COMNENUS.

Here, take my sword. Bring me a cup of wine.

[*Exit Attendant.*

And he is dead?

MACRINUS.

He bled to death, my Lord.

A barber there had left the instrument

Wherewith he did this violence to himself.

COMNENUS.

He's better dead, so let us hope, much better.

Thou would'st not think 't, Macrinus, but 'tis true,

Had I been of this war the wilful cause,

I could have kill'd myself for conquering,

As soon as he for suffering defeat.

Though it be not a soldier's word to say,

The sight of all this blood hath sicken'd me.

MACRINUS.

No blood hath needlessly been shed by us.

COMNENUS.

By us, I trust, no drop. But think, Macrinus,

When civil war 's a-foot, whate'er the cause,
And whosoe'er the leaders, in the fray
How many a beast breaks loose and roams abroad
In shelter of an honourable name.
Go, good Macrinus, give my orders forth,
That whosoe'er unsheathes his sword this night,
But at the word of his commander, dies ;
And in the public view of all who pass,
Plant in each quarter where the throng is thick
A headsman and his block. Look it be done.
If chopping off of heads can stop the course
Of these disorders, I will have them stopp'd.

MACRINUS.

I will about it straight.

COMNENUS.

Good night, Macrinus.

[Exit MACRINUS.]

(After a pause).

So here am I, to say my work is done.
Thus churchyard visions mock us as we merit,
When man, for lack of manliness, is made
A lazaret for the mind's maladies.

(*Walks to a casement*).

How changed those skies from what they were at eve !
They change as do the destinies of men,
And give no warning,—or at best a brief one.
Black, save a seam, a trench, a gaping chasm
Of ghastly moonshine betwixt cloud and cloud ;
And therewithin a pale and shivering star,
Like hope in far futurity, a gleam
Of half-extinguish'd light still struggles on.—
I feel that chill and heaviness of cheer,
Which follows oft a chase that 's hotly won ;
For then the hazards and vicissitudes,
The pride of conflict, spur of opposition,
The quickening sense of danger, and the need
And exercise of wit, are all effete,
And the reward of all (which seen remote
Shone like a Caucasian peak at dawn)
Meets with a cold reality the touch,
And bares the blank and nothingness of life.—
Were I a man to take delight in crowns,
And purple boots, and sending forth of bulls,
And dealing out of dignities, to wit,

Calling this man Sebastos, and that Cæsar,
Bidding one worthy follower wear red hose,
Another hope the like advancement soon,
And wear them mottled in the meantime—yea,
Could I rejoice in royal sports like these,
I should exult in this day's victory,
And not feel all this barrenness within.
I will go hence to-morrow.

Re-enter Attendant with wine.

COMENUS (*drinks*).

Ho ! the Gods !

That re-creates the spirit. Marvellous !
How this amalgam of a body and soul
Can grain by grain so interpenetrate,
That washing of a ventricle with drink
Shall strengthen and uplift the abject mind.
Oh then what potent menstruum is that,
Which shall dissolve the so compacted compound,
And segregate the subtler element,
To live apart when all the other dies.

Enter ALEXIUS.

God save your Majesty ! How speed you now ?
To her Imperial Cousin what saith Anna ?

ALEXIUS.

When first I spoke she said at once 'twas vain ;
But when I urged thy sanction to my suit,
She faltered and grew pale, then turned away,
And would not honour me with one look more.

COMNENUS.

Then shall she have her way and follow me ;
And though I be a wanderer on the earth,
I will requite her constancy with care,
And in that care may chance to find at times
A resting-place myself.

ALEXIUS.

God grant it thee !

COMNENUS.

He will so soon or late. Just as you came
I moralized the matter of that change
Which Theologians call—how aptly, say—

The quitting of a tenement, or else
The casting off old clothes—the . . . oh the Gods!
The figures are as multitudinous
And ugly as their archetype.

ALEXIUS.

To me

These seem as apt as any.

COMMENUS.

Even so.—

The Prophet of the Zend expounded thus
The secret of original sin : he said,
When Light, the Power of Good, created man,
Him Evil followed darkly as his shadow.
And this is fair philosophy, whereby
We typify what is not understood,
And say a thing is thus, and thus, and thus,
Just as another thing is thus and thus,
Though how or wherefore either thing came thus
We nothing know. Enough. To-morrow's eve
Will find me a day's journey on the road
To the Illyrian frontier.

Enter EUDOCIA and ANNA COMNENA. COMNENUS, advancing to meet them, leads ANNA to the farther part of the stage, where he remains with her.

EUDOCIA.

Our brother and our cousin meet to-night
With more than usual kindness.

ALEXIUS.

He designs
To start to-morrow for Illyrium.

EUDOCIA.

Such is his wont: wherever quiet comes,
Thence flies he for his life.

COMNENUS (*coming forward with ANNA, who joins EUDOCIA.*)

To-morrow be it then.—The little left
Of this night give to sleep. Good night to all.

ALEXIUS.

In the left wing the Protovestriary
Has seen your couch made ready.

COMNENUS.

It was needless.

In the adjoining chamber I'll lay by
My heaviest armour, write a rescript there,
And take what rest I may. Again good night. [Exit.

ANNA (*in discourse with EUDOCIA*).

. . . . I cannot tell you how it startled me;
And surely it was strange—still whensoe'er
A health was drunk and guests grew clamorous,
That ominous figure glided into sight,
Look'd slowly round and vanish'd.

ALEXIUS.

I gave leave
All should have entrance to the lower hall,
To witness the festivities. This one
Had been some straggler.

ANNA.

But her mourning dress?

ALEXIUS.

She was a suitor for some forfeit head,
And thought to move compassion by her garb.

ANNA.

Her face was veil'd, but truly hers was not
The bearing of a suitor. There was too
At times a something I had seen before—
—Oh God, I see it now——

Enter THEODORA.

EUDOCIA.

Hush ! 'tis the Princess.

THEODORA.

Ye have feasted full,
And ye are merry. I must kneel to beg
A humble boon—the body of my Sire.

ALEXIUS.

Your pardon, if my officers imposed
Such and so needless an indignity.
The fitting orders I will give myself.

THEODORA.

I know thee not, nor seek I aught of thee.
I am a suppliant to the Count Commenus.

(*To EUDOCIA.*) *Thou knowest there hath that between
us been,
Which makes it fitting I receive my suit
In audience from himself.*

EUDOCIA.

Doubtless, to-morrow

THEODORA.

Much is the doubt what morrows bring to them,
Who tire of their to-days. 'Tis now, now, now,
That I must see him, or else never more.

EUDOCIA.

Through yonder entrance, then, thou may'st approach
him. *[Exit THEODORA.]*

ALEXIUS.

Her purpose is apparent ; she will tread
Fast in the footsteps of her father.

EUDOCIA.

Yes ;
And by her aspect I much doubt if now
There be not poison working. I repent
That access has been granted her. Go in—

I fear she may design

ANNA.

Hark, hark!—a groan—

[*All rush into the inner chamber, from which*
THÈODORA passes out and crosses the stage
slowly, holding in her hand a dagger covered
with blood. The curtain falls.

THE END.

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